









SERMONS

ON

SELECT SUBJECTS.

By THOMAS SCOTT,

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SECOND EDITION.

He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. John xv. 5.

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

— xvii. 17.

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THE PREFACE.

THE sacred scriptures speak of *dead works*, and of a *dead faith*; of a *form of godliness*, and a *form of knowledge*: and in whatever way these may be combined together; the whole, as well as each of its constituent parts, must be widely different from *living faith*, the *power of godliness*, and a *new creation to good works*. So that there is often far more coincidence, *in this respect*, between men of discordant sentiments on speculative points, than is generally supposed.

To shew the absolute necessity of evangelical principles in order to holy practice; and their never-failing efficacy in sanctifying the heart, when cordially received; and to exhibit, according to the best of the author's ability, the nature and effects of genuine christianity, as distinguished from every species of false religion, without going far out of his way to combat any of them; is the especial design of this publication. But he has, at the same time endeavoured to explain, establish, and enforce his views of the gospel in that manner, which was considered as most likely to inform the mind and affect the heart of the attentive and teachable reader.

THE PREFACE.

The *doctrinal* part of the apostolical epistles is always stamped *practically*; and the holy tendency of every divine truth is clearly shewn: on the other hand, the *practical exhortations* are constantly enforced by *evangelical* motives and encouragements. This may therefore be considered as a good test of *sterling* divinity, by which it may be known from all that is counterfeit, or greatly debased with alloy.

The texts selected for these sermons are generally very plain and comprehensive; and the evident meaning of them, as they stand in the scriptures, has been carefully investigated and adhered to: so that the reader, who hesitates concerning the doctrine, or the conclusions deduced from it, may, by diligently examining the context, perceive how far these are warranted by the authority of the sacred writers. To these some forms of prayer for family worship are subjoined.

To the special blessing and disposal of the only wise God our Saviour, he would commend this feeble endeavour to glorify him and promote the cause of the gospel: and whatever reception it may meet with from the publick in general; he shall deem himself abundantly recompensed, if any persons should, by means of it, be brought to the saving knowledge of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, into whose name all Christians are baptised.

May 12, 1796.

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SERMON I.

DEUTERONOMY xxxii, 47.

It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life.

THE honoured servant of God, whose words are here selected, was favoured with health and the unabated force of all his faculties, at a very advanced time of life: and, so far from claiming a privilege of relaxation from labour, he seems, as death approached, to have redoubled his diligence, in order that the Israelites might have the things which he had taught them in perpetual remembrance. The hoary head is indeed a crown of glory, when thus found in the way of righteousness: and “blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing.”

Among other methods of durably impressing the minds of the people, Moses was directed to compose a prophetick song; as poems are generally

learned with greater eagerness, and remembered more easily, than other compositions : and at the close of this sacred song he thus addressed the people, “ Set your hearts unto all the words, which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, even all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life; and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.” Having given this earnest admonition, he was directed to ascend mount Nebo, that he might die there: a circumstance which could not fail to add peculiar energy to his concluding exhortations.

The nation of Israel had spiritual blessings proposed to them by types and shadows; and Canaan represented the everlasting felicity of heaven, the inheritance of true believers. We live under a different dispensation, and enjoy peculiar advantages. “ God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.”—“ Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip: for—how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation¹?” The words of the text are therefore at least as applicable to us, as

¹ Heb. i, 1—3. ii, 1—3.

they were to Israel of old; and we may from them take occasion—

I. To consider the subject, which is declared to be no vain thing.

II. To illustrate the import of that declaration.

III. To conclude the whole by a practical improvement.

I. Let us consider the subject, which is declared to be no vain thing.

Moses, no doubt, spoke this concerning religion: but numbers would agree to the sentiment as thus stated, who would object to it when more particularly explained. For it is evident that the prophet was not speaking of *natural religion*, or that religion which man in his present condition can discover or attain, by the exercise of his natural powers without any assistance from revelation. Alas! the history of the human race proves, that this is indeed a *vain thing*, and utterly insufficient to direct us into the knowledge of God, or to make us partakers of happiness in his presence and favour. But that religion, which Moses had taught Israel, was given by immediate revelation from God, and was exclusively intended. The

same is delivered to us at present, more fully and plainly, in the sacred scriptures; and we may perhaps obtain the clearest conceptions of it, by considering them as a message from God to us; sent by prophets, apostles, and evangelists, or rather by his well-beloved Son. As far therefore as ministers adhere to the oracles of God, they also deliver the same message; and all who disbelieve or despise them, disbelieve and despise him that sent them.

This message from God declares to us his own mysterious nature, by which he is distinguished from all the objects of idolatrous worship; it discovers to us his glorious attributes; his infinite power, knowledge, wisdom, and greatness; his eternal, omnipresent, unchangeable, and incomprehensible majesty; but, above all, his consummate justice, holiness, truth, goodness, and mercy, as harmoniously exercised in his dealings with his rational creatures, and comprising the full perfection of all that is adorable and excellent.

The message teaches us our relations and obligations to this glorious God, as our Creator, from whom we derive our being and all our capacities; "in whom we live, and move, and are," and, "who giveth us all things richly to enjoy;" and as our "Governor and Judge, to whom we are in all respects accountable. It further assures us, that our souls are immortal; that our bodies will rise again from the dead; that after death is the

judgment; and that a state of eternal retributions will succeed to the present transitory scene. And after all the conjectures and boasted demonstrations of philosophers, even these fundamental doctrines must rest entirely on the sure testimony of God: for could it be proved with certainty that the soul is naturally immortal, who could know, whether the Creator might not see good to annihilate it, now it is contaminated with sin? So that in every sense, "life and immortality are brought
" to light by the gospel."

The same message from God makes known to us his holy law, in its extensive, spiritual, and reasonable requirements, and awful sanction; with the rules of his providential government. It instructs us in the malignant nature and fatal consequences of sin; and gives us a general intimation of the manner in which this destructive evil entered into the world: though it does not satisfy our curiosity by fully explaining that mysterious subject, the difficulties of which are not peculiar to any religious system. But it far more copiously and clearly instructs us in the way, by which we may be saved from sin and misery, which is unspeakably more conducive to our advantage.

The scriptures are indeed more especially a message from God to us, concerning the person and salvation of Christ. "This is the record that God
" hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in
" his Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and he

“that hath not the Son of God hath not life¹.” This is the centre of revelation, in which all the lines meet from every part of its ample circumference. The everlasting mercy of God in purposing the salvation of sinful men; his infinite wisdom, forming the grand design of glorifying his justice and holiness, even in pardoning and blessing those who deserved the most tremendous punishment; his unfathomable love, in giving his only-begotten Son to be the Saviour of the world; the “great mystery of godliness, God manifest in “the flesh,” Emmanuel purchasing the church with his own blood; the love of Christ in his obedience unto the death of the cross for us; his glorious resurrection, ascension, and mediatorial exaltation;—these constitute the central and most essential part of the message of God to us. “This,” says he, by a voice from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye “him.”

Revelation also announces to us our real situation in this world, as criminals condemned to die: “Dust ye are, and to dust ye shall return.” This sentence will certainly and shortly be executed upon every one of us; but we are also liable to a more awful condemnation in another world, from which deliverance may now be obtained. We are therefore respited from day to day: or rather we

¹ 1 John v, 11, 12.

are put to death by a lingering execution; as every pain, disease, or natural decay, is an anticipation of the separating stroke. But we are placed under a dispensation of mercy, and it is the grand concern of our fleeting days to seek the forgiveness of our sins and the salvation of our souls, before the opportunity be for ever gone. The message therefore warns all men to flee from the wrath to come, commands them to repent and believe in Christ, and exhorts them without delay to forsake and break loose from every object, which keeps them from “fleeing for refuge to lay hold on the “hope set before them” in the gospel.

The sacred scriptures give us likewise most important information concerning the holy Spirit; as the Author of divine life, and the Giver of wisdom, strength, holiness, and consolation; as engaged to give efficacy to the word of salvation by his regenerating influences; and as promised to all those who pray for the inestimable benefit. “If “ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts “unto your children, how much more shall your “heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that “ask him¹.”

The same divine message prescribes also the means by which we may apply for these blessings, and render our Benefactor the tribute of thankful adoration. It directs us to diligent and

¹ Luke xi, 13.

persevering investigation of the scriptures; and to continual earnestness in prayer: it reveals to us our God upon a throne of grace, to which we are invited to approach through a merciful and faithful High Priest; suggests pleas to be used in our supplications; and sets before us exceedingly great and precious promises, to direct our desires and animate our hopes: and it appoints other ordinances, in which we may wait on the Lord, and renew our strength, that we may run with patience the race set before us. We are also informed in the same manner, that there is an innumerable company of holy angels, who worship before the throne of God, and are nevertheless "all sent forth "to minister unto the heirs of salvation:" and on the other hand, that there are fallen angels, numerous, powerful, subtle, malicious, and indefatigable, who watch every opportunity of doing us mischief, and especially of deceiving, defiling, and ruining our souls; from whose devices we can have no security but in the protection and guidance of him, who "was manifested to destroy the works "of the devil."

Finally, the message of God shows us the peculiar character, motives, and conflicts of those who are truly religious; and distinguishes them from all other persons: and it gives directions, instructions, examples, cautions, and encouragement sufficient to render us wise unto salvation, and thoroughly furnished unto every good work. This

view of the subject is indeed too compendious to give us an adequate idea of it; but it must suffice for our present purpose. We proceed therefore—

II. To illustrate the import of the declaration, “It is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life.”

“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God *in vain* ;” that is, to confirm a false or doubtful assertion, or in a trifling concern. This may throw light upon the subject before us. The message contained in the scriptures does not relate to things false or doubtful. There are indeed religious impostors, deluded enthusiasts, and priestly usurpations; but all religion is not enthusiasm or priestcraft: General declamations to this effect only prove that men are *unable* or *unwilling* to distinguish betwixt the genuine and the counterfeit; which evinces, that either their understandings or their hearts are very faulty.—The apostle Peter, just before his martyrdom, endeavouring that the disciples might be able after his decease to have the things he had taught them always in remembrance, added,—“For we have not followed cunningly-devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of the Lord Jesus, but were eye witnesses of his majesty: for he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the

“excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him on the holy mount.” But aware that the belief of this event depended entirely on his testimony, with that of James and John, he subjoined — “We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts!”

It may indeed be argued very forcibly, that the *publick* miracles, recorded in scripture, could never have obtained credit among contemporaries, had they not been actually performed; and that no future generation of Israelites or Christians could possibly have been persuaded, that their forefathers had always believed them, had the report been afterwards invented and propagated. Would it, for instance, by any method be practicable, to bring the inhabitants of this nation to believe that a hundred years ago the Prince of Orange, at the revolution, marched an army through the German ocean, and that this had always been known and credited?

The argument therefore from miracles openly performed, or publicly attested, before those possessed of power, and engaged by interest, reputation, and inclination to disprove them, is very

¹ 2 Peter i, 16—19.

conclusive: and perhaps no past event was ever so fully authenticated, as the resurrection of Christ, on which the whole fabrick of revelation in some respects depends. Yet *to us* the word of prophecy may be said to be still more sure: for a system of predictions of remote events, which no finite mind could possibly foresee, is interwoven with every part of the scriptures, and reaches from the first promise of the seed of the woman, to the close of the sacred canon. These have been exactly fulfilling through successive ages, in respect of the Jews and the surrounding nations; the coming of the Messiah, and every circumstance of that grand event; with the subsequent concerns of the church and of the world to this present day. This forms such a demonstration, that the Bible is indeed the word of God; that the more carefully it is examined with a serious and impartial mind, the fuller conviction it must produce. It is indeed a kind of unobtrusive permanent miracle, which escapes the notice of the careless, but gives entire satisfaction to the diligent enquirer: and to this, all who have doubts on the subject, will “do well “to take heed, as to a light shining in a dark “place,” till their own experience of the blessed effects produced by the gospel, prove an inward witness, the dawn of eternal life in their souls.

We might adduce many other arguments in confirmation of this truth, from the nature and tendency of the sacred oracles; the character of those

in every age, who have most firmly believed them; the efficacy of the pure gospel on the minds and conduct of mankind, in rendering them wise, holy, peaceful, and happy; and the manifold blessed consequences, which must follow, if all men did indeed repent of sin, believe in Christ, worship God spiritually, love him supremely, and love one another with a pure heart fervently. But these few hints are sufficient to shew that our religion is no vain or doubtful matter, but an authenticated revelation from God; and that men oppose it, because it testifies of them that their works are evil, and cannot be made consistent with the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life."

Neither is it a superfluous or unnecessary thing. Whatever plausible and soothing notions students in their retirement may entertain; facts undeniably prove, that reason, untutored by revelation, uniformly leads men into atheism, idolatry, impiety, superstition, or enormous wickedness. Renowned and elegant Greece and Rome sunk as deep into these absurd abominations, as the barbarians whom they despised. The philosophical Athenians were ignorant worshippers of an unknown God, amidst their highest improvements; nor have the most celebrated modern unbelievers been preserved from most gross absurdities, or lamentable ignorance. How perplexed and unsatisfactory are their discourses, when they attempt to shew, in what way

a sinner may be justified before God! Or when they would instruct mankind, in the method of conquering bad habits, resisting strong temptations, overcoming the world, or meeting death with humble, serious, and reflecting composure!

If then unaided reason, in its highest advancement, can give so little satisfactory information on these most important points; what must have been the state of the world at large, if revelation had not been vouchsafed? So far therefore from deeming it unnecessary, we ought to value it unspeakably more than gold and precious stones; and to relish it "as sweeter than honey and the honey-comb."

The message of God is no vain thing, because it is exactly adapted to the condition of mankind, and fully adequate to the case of the most enslaved sinner upon earth. If a man's crimes have been ever so numerous, complicated, and atrocious, during the whole course of a long life; if his propensities, habits, and connexions, expose him to the combined force of many formidable temptations; and if his difficulties and distresses be urgent in the extreme;—yet, by attending to the word of the gospel in humble faith, he shall surely be guided into the way of peace, find effectual assistance in the path of duty, be extricated from all perplexities, made victorious over all enemies, and finally be brought to the enjoyment of eternal felicity. Indeed whenever we mistake our duty or

our interest, or whenever we are cast down on any account, it may be said to us, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures;" and forget that "thus it is written, and thus it must be." We want no other directions, or encouragements, than such as are contained in the Bible: nothing can be added to this perfect rule of faith and practice. All that we can do in this matter to good purpose, consists in calling the attention of mankind to the scriptures, explaining their contents, and exhorting them to believe and obey the divine message: and if any one, whether he be a moralist or a philosopher, an inventor of superstitions, or pretender to new revelations, attempt to add to the Scriptures, or to amend any thing in them; he may be compared to an optician, who should undertake, by new discoveries, and well-constructed glasses, to improve the light of the sun.

Nor is the message of scripture a vain thing, or *a matter of small importance*: Moses therefore added, "because it is your life." "Whatsoever a man hath will he give for his life," is a maxim that is generally found true, though it was once spoken by the father of lies. The merchant throws his rich freight into the sea, when it endangers his life: and the patient rewards the surgeon for performing some torturing operation, when it is necessary to rescue him from death. In ordinary computations life is deemed our highest interest; capital punishment is regarded as the most formi-

dable; and it is an *admired*, though often a proud and rebellious heroism, when a man prefers death to penury, ignominy, or bondage. Yet our Lord hath said, "Fear not them that kill the body, and "after that have no more that they can do; but "fear him, who hath power to destroy both body "and soul in hell." And "what is a man profited, "if he gain the whole world, and lose his own "soul?" Our temporal life is not principally concerned in the subject before us, but our future and eternal condition. When Christ declares, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, "but the righteous into life eternal;" the same original word is used in both clauses: the punishment could not be *eternal*, if the person punished should at length cease to exist; and the strongest expressions of the copious Greek language, that language of speculating philosophers, are used in scripture to denote the eternity of the punishment, prepared for the wicked in another world. We are not competent to determine what sin deserves, or how it behoves the Governor of the universe to show his abhorrence of it. "Shall not the Judge "of all the earth do right?" It is our wisdom to submit to his justice and to seek his mercy; and not to waste our lives in vain disputations, concerning matters too deep for our investigation.

We must, however, close this part of the subject in a summary manner.—It depends on the reception which we give the message of God,

whether we shall for ever enjoy his inestimable favour, or feel the weight of his awful indignation; whether our capacity of reflection, memory, and anticipation shall be our noblest privilege, or our most aggravated misery; whether we shall bear the holy image of God, or be given up to the unrestrained dominion of every hateful passion; and whether happy angels or apostate spirits shall be our companions, during our eternal existence. In the mean time, this must also determine, whether in the present life we shall possess that peace of God which passeth all understanding; or resemble the tempestuous waters of the ocean, in the dissatisfied and unsettled state of our minds; whether we shall pass through life with comfort and usefulness, and meet death in joyful hope; or spend our days in vanity and vexation, and at length be driven away into darkness and despair.

The scriptures certainly require all who would "declare the whole counsel of God," to use this decided language: and whatever plausibility may appear in the reasonings or conjectures of those that become the advocates of the heathen, whom St. Paul declared to be "without excuse;" it is impossible, consistently with scripture, to entertain the least hope concerning persons who reject revelation, and prefer their own self-flattering imaginations to the sure testimony of God. It hath therefore been sufficiently shown, that the subjects of which we treat, as far as we adhere to

scripture, are most certain, necessary, and important; and that, in comparison, all the objects, which ambition, avarice, or sensuality pursue, are frivolous as the toys of children, and transient as a dream when one awaketh.

III. Then let us conclude the subject by a practical improvement.

It can scarcely be expected that they, who avowedly disregard all religion, will trouble themselves to attend to these instructions: otherwise we might very forcibly insist on the folly and madness of their conduct. We would say to such men, 'Do you act upon principle? or do you not?' If you answer in the affirmative, you profess yourselves to be atheists, or at least to hold sentiments which are practically equivalent to atheism. But does any one of those frantick enthusiasts whom you despise, imagine so wild an absurdity, as they do, who ascribe this fair creation, in which wise contrivance and boundless goodness emulate each other, to blind chance or necessity; or imagine a Creator, who totally disregards the work of his own hands? But were this absurd principle, which contradicts demonstrable truths, as near to certainty as it is possible, what would you gain by it? Should you at last find yourselves mistaken, your loss would be infinite; should you be right in your notion, you have not the smallest advantage:

unless you choose to own, that as *you* spend your lives, it will be an advantage to die like the brutes, and that the atheism of your understandings springs from the depraved affections of your hearts.

But if you allow that there is a God, who created and governs the world, on whom all are dependent, and to whom all are accountable: how infatuated must you be, to live as if there were none! never to enquire what your Creator commands or forbids! To be indifferent whether he be pleased or displeased! Wantonly to do those things, against which your consciences protest, as contrary to the will of God! Bestowing no pains to avert his wrath, when you know you have offended him! But wasting your lives in palling sensualities, insipid dissipations, wearisome pursuits, and a constant succession of vain expectations; bitter disappointments, and multiplied crimes, till a hopeless death drops the curtain, and closes the mournful scene!

And are you then entitled, as persons of superior discernment and sagacity, to treat pious christians with supercilious contempt, as men of weak intellects and disordered minds? When all the instances of credulity and indiscretion, which the whole company of religious people through all generations have exhibited, bear no manner of proportion to the madness and folly of an irreligious life.

Supposing however, that you do pay some attention to this most important concern: is it not also evident, from the subject we have been considering, that you ought to bestow great pains to discover the true religion, and to discriminate it from all others? Numbers are of opinion, that people should adhere to the religion in which they were educated: but does not this imply that they deem all religion a vain and trifling matter? A nation may retain some inconvenient usages, without much censure: but to support unjust and ruinous laws, because their fathers did so, would imply a most unreasonable and detestable obstinacy. Thus some circumstances in religion may perhaps be retained, because they are deemed venerable for their antiquity; but its grand essentials are our life, and we are ruined, if we prefer human tradition to divine revelation. Such an opinion vindicates the Jews in rejecting the gospel, and exculpates those who cried out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." It espouses the cause of pagans, Mahometans, and papists; while it condemns prophets, apostles, martyrs, and zealous reformers: and in short it considers it criminal to oppose any established error or imposition. But the monstrous deformity of this tenet must be visible, whenever it is brought forth to the light; and we need only exhort every one to consider the subject with application to himself, and to act accordingly. It will then be deemed most *rational* to examine with diligent and impartial

care the evidences of divine revelation; and, if the mind be satisfied in this respect, daily to search the scriptures, with earnest prayer for divine instruction, according to the apostle's exhortation, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not."—But let it be also remembered, that multitudes study religion as a science, and thus adopt a scriptural creed, yea, are useful in propagating the truth, who yet are not themselves truly religious. Nay, many have prophesied and wrought miracles, who have been at the same time workers of iniquity. Notions may float in the understanding, when they do not durably affect the heart, or influence the conduct: but unless the truth be an engrafted and sanctifying principle in the soul, it must be "held in unrighteousness;" and such a religion is indeed a vain thing, though vital christianity is unspeakably valuable and important.

Our Lord requires his disciples to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." We should set out in early youth with this most important business: but if we have wasted a great part of our lives already, we should immediately attend to it with proportionable earnestness and industry. We should begin every year, month, week, and day, with this one thing needful; to which the prime of our affections, and the best of our hours should be dedicated: and all other

pursuits if possible rendered subservient. “Labour not then,” my friends, “for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give you.” If this be neglected, all is lost, whatever else may seem to succeed; if this be secured, all things will surely turn out to your advantage.

While we therefore call upon you in the name of Christ, “to strive to enter in at the strait gate;” to deny yourselves and bear your cross for his sake; and to beware that no earthly object rival him in your affections: while we warn you, that it is impossible to serve God and Mammon, and remind you that the friendship of the world is enmity with God: or while we endeavour to prevail with you, “to count all things but loss, that you may win Christ, and be found in him:”—what do we but inculcate the maxims of heavenly wisdom? Does any prudent man hesitate to renounce an inferior interest, when it comes in competition with a greater, or to neglect some trivial concern, when business of the last importance demands his attention? And who, almost, refuses to part with a right hand, in order to preserve his life? But alas; “the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.”

The worldly man having selected his object, gives it his most decided preference; he adopts and persists in the most suitable means of success;

he exercises self-denial in various ways, devises new expedients, never loses sight of his main point, and endeavours to render every thing, even religion itself, subservient to his grand design. But how different is the conduct of numbers who profess the gospel! How negligent are they of the means of grace! or how soon weary of attending on them! how trivial a matter serves as an excuse for omission, and how unwilling are they to venture or endure any thing in this momentous concern! Men in general are far more punctual to their commercial engagements, or even to their social appointments, than in the ordinances of God: and did lawyers or physicians study their several subjects, no more than nominal Christians do the Bible; or were the courtier as slack in waiting on his prince, as they are in coming to the throne of grace; how would men exclaim against their folly and inconsistency! Alas! even the true believer may reflect on the conduct of the prudent tradesman, the valiant soldier, and the candidate for royal or popular favour, till he is covered with shame and confusion.

But let us, my brethren, not yield to this supineness: let us examine the grounds on which we expect eternal life, as a prudent man would look into the title-deeds of a valuable estate. Let us endeavour to convince our children and relatives, by word and deed, that we seek these

blessings for them also, as the grand concern: for alas! even where creeds and catechisms are taught, the conversation of the parlour, and the general system of education, often suggest an opposite conclusion. Let us consider, that we make the best use of our talents, and are the best friends to our country and to mankind, when we most endeavour to promote the interests of true religion. And should we in this course meet with many discouragements, let us not be weary in well doing, for assuredly we shall reap in due season, if we faint not.

SERMON II.

DEUTERONOMY, vi, 6—9.

These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children; and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up: and thou shalt bind them as a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes; and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house, and on thy gates.

THE observation is not more common than just, 'that if religion be any thing it is every thing.' If Christianity be true, the consequences of our present conduct are infinitely important: and while the infidel may be more atrociously criminal and extensively mischievous; the professed believer, who lives like other men, is the most inconsistent character in the world. The language of scripture does not accord to that of modern times:

wicked *Christians* and *irreligious believers* are never mentioned in the sacred volume: faith is never supposed separable from a holy life: all worldly men are represented as unbelievers, or as only possessing a dead faith; and all believers are spoken of as the servants of God, who live to his glory, and are distinguished from other men by the whole tenour of their conduct, and not merely by their principles. These things are as observable in the old, as in the new, Testament: for true religion has been *essentially* the same ever since the fall of Adam, though many *circumstantial* alterations have taken place: and indeed the perfections of God, the wants of a sinner, and the nature of holiness and happiness are in themselves immutable.

I shall therefore without further introduction, proceed to discourse on the words of the text, as applicable to Christians, with an authority proportioned to their peculiar advantages. “These words which I command thee this day,” even the great doctrines and precepts of the Bible, “shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children: and thou shalt talk of them, when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up: and thou shalt bind them upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes: and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house,

“and on thy gates.” It is, alas! too obvious, that professed Christians do not generally observe either the letter or the spirit of this exhortation: nay, that numbers of them would censure or ridicule any of their acquaintance, who should practise according to it! Whether this prove that most men are Christians only in name, or whether some more satisfactory account can be given of the undeniable fact, every one must determine for himself.

I shall endeavour from the words of the text,

I. To point out some of the leading principles of our holy religion, which especially demand our unremitting attention.

II. Explain and illustrate the exhortation, and suggest the most effectual methods of reducing it to practice.

III. Shew the reasonableness of such a conduct.

And may the Lord vouchsafe us his special help and blessing, while we meditate on this important subject! For it is astonishing and lamentable to observe, how slightly even they who seem to be religious pass over such urgent exhortations. So that while a vast majority of mankind are altogether asleep in sin, the rest seem not to be half

awake to matters of infinite and eternal importance.

I. In pointing out some of the leading principles of our holy religion, which especially demand our most earnest attention, we cannot begin more properly than with the perfections and authority of God, and our relations and obligations to him. Though most men allow these truths; yet their conduct, in this respect, marks very strongly the distinction between the religious and irreligious part of mankind. Who can imagine, that the gay, the sensual, the covetous, or the ambitious, have a constant and serious recollection of that holy, omnipresent, omniscient, and almighty God, in whom we all profess to believe? May we not rather conclude, that "God is not in all their thoughts;" at least, that they do not willingly consider his character as described in the sacred scriptures? Do such men habitually recollect the majesty and authority of the Lord, their obligation or accountableness to the Creator and Judge of the world? Do they act under a constant sense of his all-seeing eye? Do they endeavour to please him in their most secret and common actions, or by their inmost thoughts and motives? Do they seek happiness in his favour, and liberty in his service? Or do they, when conscious of having offended, rely on the mercy of God, and seek an interest in the salvation of his Son, as the grand

object of their deliberate choice, and most fervent desires? I apprehend that the most admired and applauded characters, in Christian countries, are as entire strangers to this course of life, as the very pagans themselves.

It is indeed one great end of preaching, to convince men, that religion does not consist in coming once or twice a week to publick worship, or at stated seasons to the Lord's table: and that these are only appointed means of bringing them habitually to acknowledge God in every part of their conduct; that their actions, conversation, and dispositions, may be influenced by a sense of his presence and authority; that pious meditations, ejaculations, and praises may habitually spring from the temper of their minds, as occasion requires; and that their daily employments, regulated by genuine piety, may be a constant succession of services to their Master who is in heaven.—Who can deny that the law of God requires this at our hands? that the example of Christ recommends and enforces it? or that the apostle inculcates it, when he says, “Whether ye eat, or whether ye drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God?” Perfection indeed cannot here be attained; nor can we say what measure of this habitual recollection is essential to genuine piety: but if this be the nature of true religion when perfected, it must proportionally be the same in its lowest degrees. If we do not propose to ourselves a high standard,

our actual attainments will be very low: and if the *nature* of our religion differ from all our ideas of the worship and holiness of angels, we shall doubtless be finally excluded from their society, as incapable of their holy felicity.

The eternal world is another subject, which demands our unremitting attention. Death and its important consequences; and the awful realities of that solemn season, when “all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation,” should be familiar to our thoughts, and frequently be made the subject of our conversation. Eternity—the shortness of time—the uncertainty of life—the importance of this fleeting season of preparation for the tribunal of God—the sin, the folly and infatuation, of wasting it in the eager pursuit of perishing things, or in frivolous and pernicious amusements. By frequently recurring to these topics, we should endeavour to excite ourselves, and to “exhort one another, while it is called to-day; lest any of us should be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” A mispent day, or even an idle hour, must on reflection give pain to the man, who duly considers the words of Christ, “Watch and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things which are coming on the earth, and to stand

“before the Son of man.” “Let your loins be
 “girded about and your lamps burning, and ye
 “yourselves like unto men that wait for their
 “Lord.” “Be ye, therefore, ready also: for in an
 “hour that ye think not, the Son of man cometh.”

Our chief business is not with men: our grand interest is not placed in earthly objects. The Lord himself is “he with whom we have to do;” and if we are indeed believers, “we look not at the
 “things which are seen, but at the things which
 “are not seen: for the things which are seen are
 “temporal, but the things which are not seen are
 “eternal.” This was the case with all that cloud of witnesses which have gone before us. “Enoch
 “walked with God and was not, for God took
 “him.” Moses preferred the reproach of Christ and the sufferings of God’s people, to the riches, honours, and pleasures of Egypt:—for he “had
 “respect to the recompence of reward.” The Old Testament-saints “all died in faith, not hav-
 “ing received the promises, but having seen them
 “afar off; and were persuaded of them, and em-
 “braced them, and confessed that they were
 “strangers and pilgrims upon the earth.” The primitive Christians “suffered joyfully the spoiling
 “of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven
 “a better and a more enduring substance.” They
 “counted not the sufferings of this present time
 “worthy to be compared with the glory that shall
 “be revealed:” and many of them considered

“ death as their gain, “ that “ being absent from “ the body, they might be present with the Lord.” Yet in these days this kind of life not only appears visionary to profane scoffers and infidels; but many who profess and contend for the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, seem not at all aware, that one grand difference between a believer and other men, consists in the decided preference which he gives to eternal things, above all the interests and enjoyments of this sublunary world. “ To be “ carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually “ minded is life and peace.”

The divine law should likewise occupy a large share of our thoughts and conversation. It is spiritual, holy, just, and good, and given to be the rule of our conduct, and the standard of our judgment, and it is written in the hearts of all true believers. Thus David exclaims, “ Oh, how I “ love thy law! it is my meditation all the day.” “ I esteem all thy precepts in all things to be “ right.” “ I love thy commandments above gold, “ yea, above much fine gold:” and, “ I will walk “ at liberty for I seek thy precepts.”

Numbers of men called Christians, prescribe to themselves no other rule, than the law of fashion, custom, honour, or trade; that is, the law of their own peculiar circle. Others judge of their conduct by some scanty maxims of morality, or their own notions of right and wrong: and few, even of those who profess to believe, seem willing to

use the commandments of God for these important purposes.—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God
“with all thy heart, thy mind, thy soul, and thy
“strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as
“thyself.” These are the two great commandments, in which the whole law is briefly comprehended. But who can fully explain such extensive precepts, or speak of them in terms of commendation equal to their excellency? There can be no part of our conduct, or desire of our hearts; no thought, word, or action whatever; which does not either agree or disagree with these two grand branches of that “holiness, without which
“no man shall see the Lord.” With these, the believer, as far as he acts in character, compares himself continually; and thus determines, whether he hath acted right or wrong in the various circumstances and relations of life. By this rule he learns to decide in doubtful cases; and he keeps it in constant view, while he considers how he should spend his time, use his substance, or employ his talents; what connexions he should form; whether he should contract or extend his acquaintance; what business or situation he should prefer; or how he should regulate his methods and habits of living. In short, he endeavours to conform himself to the law of God, as the man of fashion or of business does to the rules of the circle with which he is connected.

But when we have seriously considered the comprehensive, spiritual, and holy requirements of this perfect standard, we shall proportionably be convinced of numberless transgressions, and of immense deficiencies even in our best services: "for by the law is the knowledge of sin." We shall judge very differently of our own characters, than other men do; or than we ourselves did, before we began to weigh them in this balance of the sanctuary. When each successive hour, and all that passes in our thoughts and conduct, is tried by the law of loving God with all our minds, and our neighbour as ourselves, the boasted goodness of our hearts, the imagined innocency of our lives, the compensating efficacy of our meritorious actions, and the whole fabrick of our self-complacency, vanish "as a dream when one awaketh." Then we readily understand that "by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified in the sight of God;" and there no longer appears to be any thing absurd, or peculiarly difficult in this part of the apostolical doctrine. That question becomes important to us, which perhaps we once deemed insignificant or speculative, "How shall man be just before God?" We enquire with increasing solicitude, "What must we do to be saved?" And we are prepared to welcome information, on the method in which the perfect justice and holiness of God can consist with his abundant mercy, in pardoning and saving

transgressors; without excepting even those who have committed the most numerous and heinous offences. Thus the peculiar doctrines of the blessed gospel of God our Saviour come regularly under consideration; and open to our view, in their nature, glory, and value, in proportion as we judge ourselves by the holy commandment, and anxiously seek deliverance from the wrath to come.

It is very affecting to the serious mind to reflect on the supercilious disdain, with which men in general treat such enquiries, and those who are engaged in them. The natural philosopher, with an air of self-importance, considers his experiments on the properties of material substances, as an employment of superior excellency: and after having spent many months in most exact and minute investigations, he will smile, with mingled pity and contempt, at the folly of his neighbour, who hath occupied a few weeks in studying the way of eternal salvation! Metaphysicians frequently deride all those, as discarding the use of their reason, who decide such questions according to the sure testimony of God! Cold formalists obviate all enquiry by saying that 'a good life is every thing in religion:' and even men of business and pleasure suspend their eager pursuits to join in ridiculing those humble penitents who seriously attend to this important concern! Yet surely it is most reasonable for a condemned criminal to enquire in

the first place, how he may obtain a pardon: and who can doubt, but that person will be most secure from the danger of a fatal mistake, who learns the way of approach and success from the Sovereign himself?

These subjects directly make way for the right understanding of evangelical truth: the man, whose views have been described, will perceive that the gospel exactly suits his case, and is worthy of his most cordial reception. He will not object to the truths of Christianity, because mysterious; nor despise them, under pretence of attending exclusively to practice; nor abuse the mercy of God, as an encouragement to sin: he will perceive the connexion and harmony of evangelical doctrines with the whole system of revelation; and will seek the promised blessings in the appointed way: repentance and works meet for repentance will connect with the life of faith in the Son of God; while his faith will work by love, and love sweetly constrain him to live to the glory of "him, who died for him, and rose again." These truths will be the nutriment of his faith and hope; he will meditate on them from day to day; thence he will derive all his strength, motives, and encouragement for obedience: nor would his knowledge of the rule of duty suffice even for practical purposes, were he not influenced by the principles of the gospel. I proceed therefore,

II. To explain and illustrate the exhortation itself, and suggest the most effectual methods of reducing it to practice.

These things must be in *our own hearts*, before we can to any good purpose teach them to others, or make them the subject of our frequent conversation. We should therefore apply ourselves, with persevering assiduity, to obtain a comprehensive and familiar acquaintance with the doctrines of revelation, in all respects. Our memories should be stored with the precepts, examples, warnings, and promises of the Bible. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” This cannot be done, unless we carefully attend to our Lord’s exhortation. “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life.” “The hand of the diligent maketh rich:” and he, whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates in his law day and night, shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” This man shall be blessed, and shall be a blessing to others.

Labour then, my brethren, to get thoroughly acquainted with the oracles of God: let your judgment be formed according to them: proportion your approbation of characters and actions by this divine standard. In this manner judge of

your acquaintance, connexions, and friends; and above all, judge thus of yourselves. Try by this rule every pursuit, attainment, or distinction among men: let your fears, hopes, desires, joys, and sorrows, be regulated according to it; that all the affections of your souls may be influenced by the pure and animating principles of our holy religion. Thus, when fatigued with business or disgusted with the world, you will have a never-failing source of refreshment, and a most salutary relaxation, to invigorate your weary powers, and recruit your exhausted spirits.

When the word of God is thus treasured up and engrafted in our hearts, we shall be disposed and qualified to teach his truths and precepts to our relations, to speak of them among our friends, and to diffuse the knowledge of them in the circle of our acquaintance. This is strenuously enforced by the exhortation of our text. "Thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children; and thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." In reducing these rules to practice, much depends on external circumstances: When the Christian possesses wealth, or influence, and hath extensive connexions, he ought to attempt great things: while a little may be done in a more obscure situation, by edifying discourse, letters, or the distribution of books: provided opportunities be

sought after, and diligently improved. We allow, indeed, that conceited disputatious talkers, whose conduct does not consist with their principles, or who grosly violate the properties of relative life, are often a disgrace to religion: but when divine truth occupies the heart and influences the conduct; a man's ordinary conversation may be rendered very useful, in diffusing religious knowledge, and making others wise unto salvation.

They, however, who are placed at the head of families, should deem themselves peculiarly called upon to teach their children and servants. The examples of scripture are in this respect very encouraging and instructive.—The Lord had given promises of special blessings to the posterity of Abraham, and he was made a principal instrument in preparing the way for their accomplishment. “I know him,” saith God, “that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do judgment and justice, *that* the Lord may bring upon Abraham the thing that he hath spoken to him of¹.” “As for me, and my house,” says pious Joshua, “we will serve the Lord.” Cornelius the centurion, who “feared God with all his house,” and who had pious domesticks, and even soldiers around him, (though doubtless most of them had been educated pagans,) may be consi-

¹ Gen. xviii, 19.

dered as a remarkable instance of the blessing attending this kind of religious instruction: while the awful doom of Eli and his family, may serve as a salutary caution to all who are in this respect, tempted to indolence or timidity.

The ancient method of rendering the truths and precepts of religion familiar to the minds of men, especially of children and servants, is described in the text: "Thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." And why should the same method be less effectual at present, if it were properly employed? Did we daily instruct our households, by reading and explaining the scriptures to them, along with family-worship; and then frequently converse with seriousness on edifying subjects; did we take occasion from common occurrences, to direct the attention of those around us to the over-ruling providence of God, the fatal effects of sin, the lamentable evidences of human depravity, and the suitableness of the gospel to the state of the world; and did we joyfully embrace every opportunity of inculcating right principles, rectifying mistakes, and making pertinent remarks: young people would be more generally preserved from scepticism, and a considerable barrier would be placed to the incursions of infidelity and impiety. Our Lord himself hath taught us this way of improving conversation, in the most simple

and easy manner imaginable : he deduced profitable instructions from every occurrence; and grafted the most important admonitions, even on the insidious questions and impertinent objections of his enemies. We cannot indeed expect to speak with his consummate prudence and irresistible energy: yet we should remember that in this, as in all other things, “ he hath left us an example that we should follow his steps;” and promised to give his disciples “ a mouth and wisdom, which all “ their enemies shall not be able to resist.”

We are also taught in scripture to encourage young persons in asking questions on religious subjects, by giving them plain and satisfactory answers: and some institutions seem to have been chiefly intended to give occasion for such enquiries¹. “ The Lord established a testimony in “ Jacob, and appointed a law which he command- “ ed our fathers; that they should make them “ known unto their children; that the generation “ to come might know them, even the children “ that should be born, who should arise and de- “ clare them to their children, that they might set “ their hope in God².”

The neglect of this duty is a very dark sign of the present times. Children in general are trained up amidst those very vanities, which they who presented them for baptism solemnly vowed they

¹ Exod. xii, 36, 37. xiii, 10—14. Josh. iv, 21, 22.

² Ps. lxxviii, 3—8.

should renounce! They are early initiated into the corrupt maxims and fashions of this evil world, and brought to join in its frivolous and fascinating pleasures; and instead of being cautioned against the dangers of conformity to it, are taught to fear nothing so much as the least appearance of singularity! Nay, those persons, who profess a serious regard to religion, often act as if they were anxious to give their children a relish for those seducing trifles, from which they themselves appear to be weaned; and afraid lest they should too early choose the good part that can never be taken from them! It is inexpressible how much these things promote ungodliness, and prevent the permanent success of the gospel. But let us, my brethren, aim “to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;” hoping and longing that they may be “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood,” a holy and peculiar people, by whom true religion may be supported after our decease, and transmitted to future ages. In this view we may consider them as real blessings: but in what other light can a pious parent behold his beloved offspring without the most painful reflexions?

We ought not, however, to confine our efforts within the limits of our own families, but should endeavour to propagate our religious principles in the world. What reason indeed can we have to be ashamed of them? Or how can we timidly conceal them, without being ashamed of Christ and his

words? We live, it is true, among men called Christians: yet it is almost deemed an outrage on good manners, to speak seriously of the doctrine and salvation of our Lord and master! Shall we then hold our peace, and sanction the conduct of a lukewarm or apostate generation by our example? God forbid! We are commanded to bind the great truths and precepts of his word, “as a sign upon our hands, and as frontlets between our eyes; and to write them on the posts of our houses, and on our gates.” This can imply nothing less than an open profession that we are the worshippers of God, and the disciples of Christ; that we believe the Scriptures, embrace the gospel, and make the commandments of the Lord the rule of our conduct. These things should be clearly understood by our friends and connexions, that when they enter our houses they may say, ‘God is worshipped in this family;’ that they may be restrained from evil in our presence by the consideration of our character and profession, and be prepared to hear from us such pious reflections as may occur in the course of conversation.

We shall rejoice at the last day to have our faith and piety made known before the assembled world: what then can induce us to conceal them at present, but fear of ridicule or reproach? We should recollect that an intrepid profession of the truth, without ambiguity or prevarication, is expressly

required by the Lord Jesus from all his disciples ; that this is one grand mean of promoting his cause in the world ; that the scorn, to which it may expose us, is a clear demonstration of the great contempt, in which the divine Saviour is held, even among his professed disciples ; and that this is evidently a cross to be born for his sake, “ who “ bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” Let us then,

III. Consider the reasonableness of such a conduct.

Should a liberal and honoured benefactor earnestly demand our attention to a message he had sent us ; we should doubtless examine it with studious accuracy, and explicitly comply with his desires. Should a friend bequeath us a legacy, we should not be wanting in examining the favourable clause of his testament, and availing ourselves to the utmost of his kind remembrance. But the message of God, in all respects, is far more entitled to our strictest regard. He who made us, and against whom we all have sinned, condescends to teach us how we may escape eternal misery and obtain eternal happiness ! Is it not then most reasonable, that we should diligently observe his instructions, and recommend them with our whole influence ? The world is against us ; the broad road to des-

truction is thronged; false religion unites with impiety in rendering our situation most perilous; God himself condescends to guide us in the safe and happy path; and shall we reject his counsels? Our own hearts are deceitful, the powers of darkness unwearied in their subtle efforts to delude us; and shall we not use every means of escaping their wiles, and warning others to elude their devices? New forms of delusion start up every day: shall we not then bestow pains to distinguish the truths of revelation from damnable heresies? Surely it is most reasonable, both to study the Scriptures, and to pray without ceasing for the teaching of the holy Spirit; that we may be kept from the ways of the destroyer, established in the pure principles of Christianity, preserved from innumerable dangers, find unfailing resources of support and comfort in trying circumstances, be rendered useful in our respective stations, meet death with joyful hope, and leave the world in full assurance of everlasting felicity.

The knowledge and wisdom, which may be derived from a careful investigation of the Scriptures, will be found of the utmost importance, even in conducting our temporal concerns. We shall thus learn the best discretion in estimating characters, and judging of men's pretensions and professions; be directed how to act even in respect of their prejudices and mistakes; and learn to accommodate

ourselves to varying circumstances, without countenancing evil by improper compliances, or preventing our own success by violent opposition, where gentleness might have obviated the difficulty.

But the subject is too copious to be fully discussed on this occasion. It must suffice to observe, that the advantages of diligence and earnestness, in the grand concerns of our holy religion, far more than counter-balance the self-denial that it requires. For what is it, but bestowing pains to be happy and useful? to live and die in comfort? and to use proper means of rendering our children and relatives happy? that they too may serve their generation according to the will of God, leave the world with joyful hope, and meet with us in heaven. And are not these objects well deserving of our utmost diligence and unwearied attention?

Let me then conclude with the observation which introduced the subject: 'If religion be any thing, 'it is every thing.' It must be our business in this world, if we would enjoy a warranted hope of felicity in the world to come: yea, it must be our element here, in order to a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Every man's own conscience must decide, how far this is his character and experience; and every one must be left to apply the subject to his own case, for conviction,

admonition, or encouragement. And may the Lord himself enable us to attend to these things, according to their immense and eternal importance; and teach us so to “number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” Amen.

SERMON III.

ISAIAH, vi. 5—8.

Then said I, woe is me! for I am undone: because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.—Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, here am I, send me.

WHEN Isaiah had already been employed a considerable time in the prophetic office, he was greatly disconcerted by a remarkable vision, which he records in the chapter before us.—We ought not to imagine that things outwardly exist, as they appeared to the minds of the prophets, when their senses were closed during the visions of

the Almighty; but that they were impressed with such representations, as were suitable to convey the intended instruction. The scene of these emblematic discoveries was laid at the temple; every intervening veil was apparently removed; the most holy place was made manifest; and JEHOVAH was seen in glory above the mercy-seat, as on "a throne high and lifted up, and his train," (or the skirts of his robes) "filled the temple." This description evidently leads the mind to the idea of one in human form; and St. John instructs us, that the prophet at this time saw "the glory of Christ and spake of him¹." For indeed the glory of God is especially made known, not only to the church on earth, but also to the hosts in heaven, by the person and redemption of Emmanuel².

Above the other worshippers, and nearest to the throne, stood the Seraphim, the most exalted of the angelick host, who glow with love and zeal like a flame of fire³. These, in other respects appearing in human form, had each six wings; "with two of which they covered their faces," in token of the profound reverence with which they contemplated the majesty of the Lord, before whose uncreated glories their derived excellencies were eclipsed, and disappeared: with two of them they covered their feet, as conscious that their

¹ John xii, 41. ² 2 Cor. iv, 6. Eph. iii, 10. 1 Pet. i, 12.

³ Ps. civ, 4.

services, though perfectly undefiled with sin, were not worthy to be noticed by the infinite and eternal God: and with their other two wings they did fly; an emblem of the celerity, alacrity, and delight, with which they execute the mandates of their Creator. At the same time they sang aloud in responsive strains, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." Entirely filled with admiration of the divine majesty and holiness; they had no leisure to reflect with complacency on their own endowments, or to panegyryze one another. Such employments they leave to us poor sinful mortals, who, amidst the obscurity of our fallen state, unaccustomed to contemplate any thing more splendid than the accomplishments of our fellow-sinners, are apt to shine in our own eyes, or in those of each other, like glow worms during the darkness of the night. But these bright seraphs, satisfied with the love of God, desire no other commendation; and are wholly taken up in adoring the glorious holiness of JEHOVAH.

The threefold ascription of holiness to the Lord of hosts, has generally been considered as an intimation of a Trinity of persons in the Godhead, and a reference to the glory of the Father, the Son, and the holy Ghost, displayed in the salvation of sinners¹. While this song of praise was re-echoed

¹ Matt. xxviii, 18—20. Rev. iv, 8.

by the seraphim, the pillars shook at every response; and smoke, or darkness, filled the whole temple, as when it was first dedicated by Solomon. The effect which this awful scene had upon the mind of the prophet, is described in the words of the text, and the interesting passage may suggest the following subjects for our consideration—

I. The causes of the prophet's distress and alarm.

II. The peculiar nature and tendency of it.

III. The relief and encouragement which he received: and

IV. The effects produced in his disposition and conduct.

I. The causes of the prophet's distress and alarm.

It appears at the first glance, that Isaiah was greatly disconcerted and humbled by the scene which he had been contemplating. Indeed suitable views of the divine majesty and glory always produce proportionable humility; and by this touch-stone, spiritual illumination may be distinguished from that "knowledge which puffeth up." When Job, to whose eminent piety the Lord

himself had born decided testimony, had been so carried away in the warmth of controversy, as to use irreverent language concerning the dispensations of Providence; he was convinced of his presumption, and awed into submission by discoveries of the divine majesty; and exclaimed, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no further." And again, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." He seemed to himself of some consequence, while disputing with his friends, and vindicating himself from their unjust charge of hypocrisy: but when JEHOVAH spake to him from the whirlwind, he shrunk as it were into nothing, and his self-importance was changed into self-abhorrence. In like manner, when Peter saw a little of the Saviour's power and authority, in the draught of fishes, which had been brought to his net, he fell down at his feet, and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

But while discoveries of the majesty of God will awe the soul into self-abasement, the knowledge of his moral excellencies is the immediate cause of those humiliating convictions, by which sinners are rendered truly penitent, and induced to welcome the salvation of the gospel. And the prophet

seems to have been especially affected by that view of the glory and beauty of JEHOVAH, which was the principal subject of adoring praises to the Seraphim before the throne. While men think little of our holy God, mistake his character, or continue in great measure unacquainted with his commandments and judgments; they compare themselves with their associates in disobedience, and estimate their conduct by some defective standard. Thus enveloped in darkness, they judge favourably of themselves, imagine they possess various excellencies, and even pretend to *merit* in the sight of God! Nor is this the case only of the moral and virtuous, for self-love will furnish the most criminal with some palliation of their vices; they will call them by a soft name, imagine others more faulty than themselves, and endeavour to compensate for undeniable and inexcusable transgression, by some pretended good actions or qualities!

But when the Lord directs the sinner's attention to the scriptures, and makes known to him in some degree his own glorious holiness; deep conviction of sin is the infallible consequence, every plea is silenced, and the trembling criminal is even ready to conclude himself lost beyond hope of recovery.

This fully accounts for that change, which often takes place, in the opinion that moral and amiable persons entertain of themselves, when they

seriously study the holy scriptures. Their decent lives, on which they formerly reflected with abundant self-complacency, are now mentioned in very degrading language; and even their present strict and exemplary conduct is accompanied with very humble confessions of guilt and defilement. This excites the astonishment of those who judge by other rules; and they are apt to suspect, either that such persons have secretly practised very gross enormities, or that they use this language from a mere affectation of humility. But in reality the same characters and actions must appear good or bad, according to the rule or standard with which they are compared: no wonder therefore, that they who have lately become acquainted with a holy God and his perfect law, and who have learned to judge by another standard, are compelled to bring in a verdict against themselves, though before they trusted that they were righteous and despised others. Thus St. Paul “was alive without the law” once; but when the commandment came, sin “revived, and he died.” He had entertained very favourable thoughts of his own moral and religious character; but when his understanding was opened to “behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” he condemned himself as the chief of sinners! nay, after all his labours and proficiency in Christianity, he was in his own esteem “less than the least of all saints!”

But these things were also illustrated to the prophet by the worship and services, which the Seraphim presented before the Lord of hosts. The holy angels "excel in strength," and are glorious beyond the conception of mortal men: so that the most eminent saints have been dismayed even at their benign appearance, or tempted to render them divine honours. Yet these exalted spirits appeared in vision, as engaged in adoration of the great **JEHOVAH**; uniting deep humility with the most exalted praises; and manifesting the fullest conviction, that their spotless services were inexpressibly beneath the excellency and greatness of that God whom they worshipped. This view seems to have greatly conduced to throw the prophet's mind into that perturbation which he discovered on the occasion.

Men in general keep each other in countenance, while they rest satisfied with a form of godliness. They go to a place of worship, and to the Lord's table; read or repeat a prayer and a thanksgiving; and please themselves with the idea that they have *done their duty*: nay, they have scarcely an idea of a more spiritual worship! But when their attention is directed to the devout aspirations of David, Daniel, and other holy men of God; especially when they contemplate the adorations of the heavenly hosts, as described in the sacred Scriptures; they become sensible by the comparison, that they have been, heedlessly or presumptuously,

presenting to the glorious JEHOVAH a formal, defiled, and hypocritical service, “drawing near to him with their lips, while their hearts were far from him.” But this very properly leads us,

II. To consider the peculiar nature and tendency of that inward perturbation, which caused this eminent servant of God to exclaim, “Woe is me, for I am undone.”

Isaiah was called when young to the prophetic office; and we may thence conclude that he had been preserved by divine grace from every evil way, and had dedicated his earliest days to the service of God. He discharged the sacred trust confided to him for about sixty years; yet we do not find, during this long period, that he ever acted inconsistently with his sacred ministry. In his private deportment and publick work, he seems to have sustained a most unexceptionable character; nor have we any proofs of his sinfulness but those found in his own confessions. Yet, on this occasion, he was so overwhelmed with the sense of his own guilt and pollution, that he was almost ready to lie down in despair! Some indeed render his words thus: “Woe is me, I am *struck dumb.*” ‘He was struck dumb,’ says bishop Lowth, ‘because he was a man of polluted lips, and dwelt among a people of polluted lips; and was unworthy either to join the Seraphim in

‘ singing God’s praises, or to be the messenger of
‘ God to his people.” And indeed, “every mouth
“ shall be stopped, and all the world become guilty
“ before God.” It is however, evident that he
was so alarmed and humbled, because “his eyes
“ had seen the King the Lord of hosts,” that “his
“ mouth was stopped, he became guilty before
“ God,” and he feared lest his religious services
and prophetic labours should increase his con-
demnation. Yet this did not arise from the
recollection of immoralities or impieties, or from
conscious hypocrisy or unfaithfulness in his mi-
nistry: but from the conviction of his mind, that
his best duties were exceedingly polluted; whe-
ther he considered the holy majesty of the Lord
to whom they were presented, or compared them
with the exalted worship of the heavenly hosts.
He would no doubt reflect, with shame and sor-
row, on his want of reverence and humility in his
religious performances; on the wandering imagin-
ations which distracted his attention; and on his
want of zeal, love, and admiring gratitude, even
in his most fervent praises and thanksgivings.
He might also, perhaps be conscious of a corrupt
self-complacency and regard to the opinion of
men, mingling even with his endeavours to glorify
God; and that he had felt but little delight in
those employments, which angels deem their high-
est privilege, and in which they enjoy unalloyed
felicity.

As the prophet of the Lord, he had likewise delivered many awful messages to the rebellious Jews: but this vision made him afraid, lest he too should fall under condemnation, for executing so important an office from corrupt motives, with a divided heart, and in an improper manner.

He was at the same time convinced, that he “dwelt among a people of polluted lips.” The Israelites were distinguished from other nations, as the worshippers of *JEHOVAH*; and when the prophet compared himself with them, he supposed that his services were pure and spiritual. But he now perceived that he ought not to be thus satisfied; for when their religious duties and professions were brought forth to the light, and viewed in connexion with the adoration of the Seraphim, it was manifest that God might justly reject them with abhorrence. It was therefore more proper for him to imitate the leper, who covered his lip, and cried, “Unclean! unclean!”

These observations illustrate the apostle’s declaration that “there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Great diversity is indeed found in the moral conduct of men; and the Judge of the world will proportion the punishment of the wicked to the number and aggravation of their crimes: but in this respect there is no difference, “for all have sinned.” The most virtuous and religious, even they who have served the Lord from their earliest days in genuine piety, must fall down before him in deep

humility; and not only confess that they have been guilty of numerous omissions, and deviations from the rule of duty, in thought, word, and deed; but that their very services have often been the fruit of polluted lips. Nor could they ever have been satisfied with them, had they not dwelt among sinners like themselves, and had not their views of that glorious God whom they professed to worship been faint and confused.

Let any man carefully and impartially examine his own devotions, in the closet, in the house of God, or at the Lord's table: let him close every duty, or every Sabbath, with endeavours to ascertain the degree of spiritual worship, and of a corrupt mixture, which the all-seeing eye of a holy God must have witnessed in his performances; and I dare confidently to foretel, that he will ere long cry out with the prophet, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags:" or in the language of the *judicious* Hooker, 'The best things that we do have something in them to be pardoned: how then can we do any thing meritorious or worthy to be rewarded? Our continual suit to the Lord is and must be, to bear with our infirmities, and pardon our offences.' Thus "the Scripture concludes all under sin; that the promise which is by Christ Jesus might be given to them that believe!" For these are discoveries of sinfulness, from which no man can escape, when he weighs himself in the balance of the sanctuary: so

¹ Gal. iii. 22.

that every one is left to his choice, either to condemn the spirituality of the law and the holiness of the Lawgiver; or to submit to the righteousness of God, and to cry for mercy, saying, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified."

This humiliation cannot be too deep; we cannot be too sensible of our guilt and pollution, or too entirely delivered from self-confidence. But we may easily be too much *discouraged*, and through despondency neglect the means of grace, and the duties of our station. Many persons, having discovered with great alarm their guilt and danger, and being convinced, by painful experience, of their inability to resist temptation or to keep their resolutions, have rushed impetuously into wickedness, impiety, or infidelity, to obtain deliverance from the reproaches of their own consciences: and probably but few are duly humbled, without passing through a measure of discouraging terrors. Even the prophet was on this occasion dismayed, as well as laid low in self-abasement; and if seasonable encouragement had not been afforded, the very intention of the vision would have been counteracted, and he unfitted for the arduous services to which he was called.

III. Then we consider the relief and encouragement which he received.

We are not indeed warranted to expect direct assurances by immediate revelation; yet the emblems of this vision aptly represent the way in which the convinced sinner finds peace and hope, connected with increasing humiliation.—It has been remarked, that the scene of this vision was the temple: the altar of burnt-offering was therefore full in view, on which the daily sacrifices and occasional oblations were consuming, by the fire that came down from heaven. The blood of numberless innocent animals slain in sacrifice, and their bodies consumed to ashes, that guilty men might be pardoned and blessed, were constant declarations that sinners deserved death, and the fiery wrath of God in another world; and that deliverance could only be obtained by faith in the promised Redeemer, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” From this altar one of the Seraphim took a live coal, and applied it to the prophet’s lips, assuring him that his “iniquity was taken away, and his sin purged.”

No endeavours were used to comfort Isaiah by persuading him, that he thought too ill of his own character and services: no intimation was made, that the vision had bewildered his mind, and inspired groundless alarms. On the contrary, the heavenly messenger of peace seemed to allow that “he was a man of polluted lips,” and that his present judgment of himself was according to truth: but he assured him, that his guilt was removed by

the atoning sacrifices, and by faith in the typified Redeemer. When Simon the Pharisee disdained the weeping penitent, who washed the Saviour's feet with her tears, our Lord did not vindicate her character or palliate her guilt; but graciously noticing her repentance, faith, and love, he declared, that, "her sins though many were forgiven." This is the uniform method of scripture: but numbers endeavour to encourage trembling sinners, by arguing them into a more favourable opinion of themselves, or by pointing out certain good actions or qualities, which may counterbalance their offences. Such are physicians of no value. They administer fatal opiates to the lethargick, when they have been in a measure awakened: and they prolong the distress of the contrite and poor in spirit. No man is terrified merely by the opinion that his sins are numerous and heinous; but through unbelief, ignorance, or indistinct notions of the divine mercy, and of the blessed gospel of God our Saviour. These are therefore the subjects, on which we should principally insist, if we would bring the distressed in conscience to permanent comfort and stable peace. "Faith comes by hearing:" and while we point out "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," we do our part to apply "the live coal from the altar" to the trembling sinner's lips. For when a man is brought to seek encouragement, not from himself or any of his services, but from the infinite mercies of God, through the

atonement blood of Christ; and to perceive the Saviour's power and willingness "to save unto the uttermost all that come to God through him;" he will soon rise superior to his desponding fears, and possess "a good hope through grace," that his "sins though many are forgiven;" or at least, that his iniquity will at length be purged away.

But whoever may be the messenger of peace to the broken in heart, the Holy Spirit is the Author and Giver of this blessing. "When the Comforter "is come," saith the Lord Jesus, "he shall convince "the world of sin:" and "He shall glorify me; "for he shall receive of mine and shew it unto "you'." When humiliating convictions have prepared the heart to welcome a free salvation, the divine Comforter enables the sinner to see the glory of God, and the harmony of his attributes, in the person and redemption of Christ: thus he finds peace and joy in believing, and at length "abounds in hope by the power of the Holy "Ghost!" This consolation is the effect of regenerating grace, and accompanied by a new creation of the soul to holiness. The faith that justifies is living and active: it works by love of God and man; purifies the heart, and overcomes the world; and thus renders the believer fruitful in good works, to the glory of God through Jesus Christ. The live coal from the altar may therefore be considered as an emblem of those spiritual affections, that are kindled in the believer's heart by the Holy Spirit, which prepare, animate, and even constrain

¹ John, xvi. 8.—15.

him, to devote his talents to the glory of God, and to employ them according to his commandments. This is the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and *of fire*, with which Jesus baptizes his true disciples: these sacred influences penetrate and enlighten the mind, warm and elevate the affections, consume the dross of low and carnal passions, and transform the whole soul into the very nature of that divine Agent by whom they are produced.

IV. Then let us proceed to consider the effects of this encouragement, on the prophet's disposition and conduct.

The vision had struck him dumb, filled him with consternation, and indisposed him for his prophetic office. But now, hearing the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" he answered without hesitation, "Here I am, send me."—Neither the consciousness of his unworthiness and insufficiency, nor the prospect of difficulties, perils, or self-denial, produced the least reluctance to the important and arduous service. His love to the Lord, and zeal for his glory, rendered him willing to go any whither, to any person, or on any message. He was ready to face a persecuting tyrant or an enraged multitude; to travel over mountains and seas, or through inhospitable deserts. He declined not hardship, poverty, or neglect; but was so desirous that the name of God should be hallowed,

his kingdom promoted, and his will done on earth even as in heaven, that he exulted in the thought of being employed as an instrument in such a work. He could not indeed *equal* the fervent zeal and rapturous worship of the Seraphim: but he desired to *emulate* the promptitude and alacrity with which they performed the commands of their Creator. Nay, he made no objections or excuses when he was sent to pronounce the condemnation of the rebellious Jews, and to be an occasion of their judicial blindness, for a warning to all others who "hate the light because their deeds are evil."

These effects of genuine encouragement to the broken in heart were by no means peculiar to the prophet. They will not indeed follow from an *unscriptural* assurance of forgiveness: but they are inseparable from comfort obtained by the exercise of living faith in Christ, under the teaching and influence of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul, speaking of his abundant labours and sufferings, adds, "Having obtained mercy, we faint not;" and afterwards, "For the love of Christ constrain-
" eth us: because we thus judge, that if one died
" for all, then were all dead: and that he died for
" all, that they who live should not henceforth
" live to themselves, but to him who died for
" them, and rose again¹." It was "his earnest
" expectation and hope,—that Christ should be
" magnified in his body, whether by life or death²;"
other "things moved him not, neither counted he
" his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 1. v. 14, 15. ² Phil. i. 20, 21.

“ his course with joy, and the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the “ gospel of the grace of God’.” Deep humiliation for sin; firm confidence in the mercy of God, gratitude to the divine Saviour, “ who loved “ him, and gave himself for him;” zeal for his glory, and compassion for perishing sinners, combined in rendering him superior to all other hopes and fears, and prepared him for most unwearied exertions and patient sufferings, in making full proof of his sacred ministry.

We allow that the subject applies with peculiar propriety to the case of those who are engaged in the same good work: but all Christians “ are “ bought with a price, that they may glorify God “ with their bodies and spirits which are his.” They all love the Lord Jesus Christ on the same grounds, though not in equal measure; they partake of “ like precious faith” with that of the apostles; and “ If any man have not the Spirit of “ Christ, he is none of his.” When therefore the deeply humbled sinner has been delivered from gloomy fears of deserved wrath, and enabled to rejoice in Christ and his pardoning love: he will certainly enquire, “ What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?” Nor will he, when under the lively impressions of admiring love and gratitude, be disposed to think any sacrifice too costly, any labour too great, or any danger too imminent, to which he may be called, in his attempts to serve

¹ Acts, xx, 24.

and honour his beloved Benefactor. This leads him to consider, in what way he may most effectually recommend the salvation of Christ to his fellow-sinners, or be useful to that "flock which he purchased with his own blood." These reflections will frequently employ his thoughts, whether he be a minister of religion, a magistrate, a steward of the unrighteous mammon, possessed of influence, or endowed with natural and acquired abilities; or whether, on the contrary, he live in a private and obscure station,—a labourer, a servant, in deep poverty, or even in a state of slavery. And whatever be the Christian's outward situation and circumstances, provided he aim to serve the Lord Jesus by a conscientious attention to his peculiar duties, in honesty, quietness, and contentment: he will be enabled to "adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour," and as certainly meet with a gracious acceptance, as if he were sent, like Isaiah and Paul, to carry his message to the church and to the world.

The performancé of relative duties, even when the most unkind returns are experienced; strict integrity under heavy losses and in trying circumstances; patience and meekness amidst sufferings and injuries; are in some respects equivalent to the prophet's alacrity in undertaking the painful service allotted him. And, in proportion as the believer can unite deep humility with assured hope and fervent zeal, he will act with decision accord-

ing to the commands of his Lord, and the opportunities or advantages afforded him. But if pride warp his steady aim and mar his simplicity, or negligence make way for guilt and alarm; he will find himself in all respects indisposed for difficult, perilous, or self-denying services. When discouragement prevails, “the hands hang down and “the knees wax feeble:” a man in this case scarcely finds himself at liberty to speak a word on religious subjects, for the instruction even of his own family; and still less to attempt any thing of a more arduous nature, for the glory of God and the benefit of his church. When David had been grievously overcome by temptations, he found that conscious guilt rendered him incapable of renewing his bold and zealous endeavours in the service of God. He therefore prayed, “Open my “lips, O Lord, that my mouth may shew forth “thy praise.” But when the joy of God’s salvation is restored, the lively exercise of every holy affection renders a man ready to say, “Here I am, “send me:” ‘If so poor a worm as I am, may glorify thy name, O Lord, I would thankfully yield myself to thy disposal, that I may be employed in any way, which may seem good in thy sight.’

If then these be indeed the effects of such humbling and encouraging views of the Lord and heavenly things, as have been described; we ought certainly to enquire with great seriousness, whether we have learned or experienced any thing of

the same nature?—And this may introduce an address to different descriptions of persons.

There are numbers, who do not wish to be thought infidels or irreligious; but call themselves believers, render some worship to God, and respect the name of Christ and the leading truths of Christianity: yet they by no means think that they are altogether sinful, and exposed to just condemnation even for the defilements of their religious duties. They adopt various methods of eluding the inferences we draw from the general declarations of scripture, concerning the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart; and object to every attempt made to convince them, that they themselves, as well as Gentiles and wicked Jews, are included in these unrestricted charges. These appear to them hard sayings; because they deprive them of every plea, undermine the foundation of their hope, and exclude all boasting and self-preference. But, if you have been used to reason and object in this manner, let me earnestly intreat and conjure you, seriously to answer the following questions: Do you really think your own hearts, characters, and services to be more holy and excellent, than those of Job, Isaiah, Daniel, or Paul? Or do you suppose that your superior sanctity is proportioned to the difference of the language you use in speaking of your virtues and duties? If you cannot without affectation adopt their humiliating expressions,

it must arise from one of these causes: either your conduct and character are far more holy than their's were; or they knew far more of God and of themselves, than you do. You are either much better men; or you are much less acquainted with those things, which are essential to a right judgment of characters and actions.

When the apostle said, "*That* God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" he assigned the real cause of the lowly opinion, which eminent saints have ever entertained of themselves: and a want of this divine illumination gives occasion for that favourable estimate which numbers form of their virtues and characters. If then this be the case, or if there be the least probability that it is so; would it not be wise in you, my friends, to intreat the Lord, that he would "open your understandings to understand the scriptures?" and would it be improper for you, frequently to meditate with fixed attention on the glorious perfections and holy commandments of God? Let me affectionately beseech you to compare your duties with the standard of holy writ; to watch your own hearts, while engaged in them; and to examine impartially your motives in those services, to which you annex some confused idea of merit, and that you hope will make amends, in part at least, for the

undeniable defects of your character. A day approacheth, in which every eye shall behold a far more glorious scene than that which overwhelmed the mind of the prophet Isaiah. The divine Saviour will appear "in his own glory, and in the glory of the Father, with all his holy angels." Then every action will be weighed in an impartial balance; every character fully made known; and every unpardoned transgressor struck dumb in the presence of his Judge, or only able to say, "Woe is me, I am undone!" while the awful words, "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," shall fill him with terror and sink him into despair. But at present there is hope: and those discoveries of guilt which tend to humble us, and prepare us for welcoming the salvation of God, should be considered as inestimable mercies, the forerunners of "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

But perhaps these subjects have rendered you uneasy and dejected; and you have on that account deemed it best to divert your attention from them, and at any rate to keep on good terms with your own consciences. You therefore neglect the scriptures, and such books, company, or preaching, as formerly disquieted you; and, hearkening to worldly counsellors, seek relief from diversions, indulgences, or a hurry of business; or perhaps try to dispel melancholy by a cheerful glass. Thus numbers close their eyes against the light, because

they hate it, till the Lord gives them up to judicial blindness!

My beloved fellow sinners, as you value your immortal souls, do not yield to such temptations. Do not shrink from the discovery of your real character and condition, while hope remains. The knowledge of the disease is the first step towards recovery: but a groundless imagination that there is no danger, is the common prelude to an incurable prevalence of the malady. As reasonable agents, examine this matter with an accuracy and impartiality proportioned to its importance: that in case your confidence of safety should be found a mere presumption, you may now seek and obtain that inward satisfaction which the prophet felt, when assured that "his iniquity was taken away, and his sin purged." Can you doubt, whether it be better to discover your danger now, or to remain strangers to it, till God shall call you to receive your eternal retribution?

But are any of you so deeply convinced of sin, as to be ready to say, "Woe is me, I am undone!" Let me caution you, my brethren, against despondency. The wreck and ruin of self-confidence makes way for evangelical hope. The Son of God came into the world to save sinners, to seek that which was lost, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, to reconcile enemies by the blood of his cross, to receive gifts for the rebellious,

to justify the ungodly, to sanctify the unholy: to give life to the dead, strength to the helpless, liberty to the captive, and felicity to the wretched. He invites all who are athirst, yea, all that are willing, to come and buy of him the blessings of salvation, without money and without price. "Him "that cometh unto me," saith the Saviour, "I "will in no wise cast out." "Behold then the "Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the "world!" He is "the Author and Finisher of "faith;" and he hath pointed out to you the proper way of seeking peace and salvation, in these most instructive and encouraging words; "Ask "and it shall be given you; seek and you shall "find; knock and it shall be opened unto you: "for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that "seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it "shall be opened¹."

But some hearers of the gospel are sufficiently confident that their sins are forgiven, and that they have experienced that change which is described in the scripture: yet they are not disposed to say, "Here I am, Lord, send me." They shew no zeal for the honour of God; no readiness for self-denying services, no tokens of being constrained by the love of Christ to live as his devoted servants. It does not appear that their terrors were accompanied by humiliation and

¹ Matt. vii, 7, 8.

hatred of sin, or their comforts by the sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience. But let us all beware of this delusion; “for every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire.”

Finally, my Christian brethren, I beseech you by the mercies of God, to desire an increase of that spiritual knowledge which produces humility; but at the same time to watch against discouraging fears, while conscious of integrity in your professed faith and love, and your desire to honour the Lord by thankful obedience. For, these indulged and needless apprehensions render the mind too feeble for active service or patient suffering; and they give religion a forbidding and unamiable aspect. Let us therefore unite all our contemplations on other subjects, with frequent meditations on the mercy and grace of God our Saviour; be very careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit by evil tempers or a selfish behaviour; and be diligent in every means of grace. Above all, let us pray without ceasing for such a sweet sense of the Lord's pardoning mercy and abundant grace, as may animate all our endeavours to shew the holy tendency of our principles, and to make those “ashamed who would falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ.”

SERMON IV.

I JOHN, IV, 8.

GOD IS LOVE.

THE sacred writers do not enforce practical religion, by such inducements as are commonly suggested by moralists and philosophers. The beauty of virtue, its utility to mankind, and its benign effects on the health, peace, interest, and reputation of the possessor, may be mentioned with propriety as subordinate recommendations: but the authority, command, example, and glory of God, constitute the primary motives and ultimate object of genuine holiness; and every duty is inculcated in the New Testament, by the encouragements and obligations of the gospel. “Beloved,” says the aged apostle, “let us love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; he that loveth not

“knoweth not God: for GOD IS LOVE.—In this
 “was manifested the love of God towards us; be-
 “cause that God sent his only begotten Son into
 “the world, that we might live through him.”

Let us then,

I. Enquire how such compendious propositions as this in the text, should be understood,

II. Illustrate the truth and importance of it, from the dealings of God with his creatures, especially with mankind.

III. Point out certain perverse inferences, which are frequently deduced from it.

IV. And lastly, make some practical use of the subject.

I. In what manner ought we to understand such compendious propositions, as this in the text?

There is a peculiar curse, as it were, connected with indolence and levity in the grand concerns of religion. If a man will trifle in matters of the last importance, and if, instead of carefully examining the meaning of an expression, as it stands in the context and forms a part of a consistent revelation,

he only attend to the mere sound of the words, allowing his prejudices and passions to interpret them; he will surely be taken in a snare, and perhaps left to wrest the scriptures to his own destruction. The diligent and faithful servant will not only consider a few words of the commands or directions of his master; but he will observe the whole of them, weigh their import, and endeavour fully to understand them. This is the proper use of reason in respect of divine revelation. We are neither authorized nor qualified to sit in judgment on the testimony of God, to reject any part of it as useless or injurious, to propose alterations, or to make additions. All such attempts are both absurd and presumptuous in the extreme. But our rational powers are the gift of God, to whom we are accountable for our use of them: and as we should soberly examine what ground we have to believe the scriptures to be a divine revelation; so we ought to study them with diligence and teachableness; and depending on the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit, endeavour to find out the real meaning of every proposition contained in them.

We meet with several comprehensive declarations in the sacred oracles; which must always be explained by comparing them with such passages, as more fully state and unfold the doctrines of Christianity. The apostle John, in another place, says that "God is Light:" James affirms, that "He is

“the Father of lights, with whom is no variable-ness or shadow of turning:” and Paul declares, that “Our God is a consuming fire.” Now a man would not think of inferring from this last expression, that the Lord cannot exercise mercy, but must punish and destroy all sinners without exception: and this apparent limitation is also implied, when it is said that GOD is LOVE.

“Thus saith the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy:” if then the Lord’s name be *Holy*, he is *holiness*, as certainly as he is *Love*. The same might be shewn in respect of all his perfections; except that Love takes the lead, as it were, in the display which he makes of his glorious character.

We discourse indeed on such subjects like children: we are wholly incapable of conceiving aright of the divine nature: the attributes of the Deity doubtless exist and operate with a simplicity that we cannot explain, and probably there is not that entire distinction between the effects of mercy, justice, truth, and holiness, in the divine nature and conduct, which appears to our contracted minds. Yet it may encourage us, under this our conscious incapacity, to reflect that the Lord himself speaks to us in our own language; as more conducive to our benefit, though less flattering to our pride. Philosophers, it is true, frequently reject the style of scripture, and attempt to prove that there is nothing in the

divine nature which can properly be called wrath, indignation, or avenging justice. But, whatever use may be made of these speculations, in teaching us to exclude from our thoughts concerning the infinite God, every idea which originates from the corrupt passions of our fallen nature: it is evident that this is not the best method of addressing mankind; neither the most intelligible, impressive, nor useful: for it is not the style of the only wise God himself. In speaking to us, he has seen good to adopt that kind of language, which is commonly used by the unlearned, that is by an immense majority of the human species.

We must therefore continue to discourse of the divine attributes, as distinct though harmonious; and when we read that "God is Love," we must suppose that a different instruction is intended, than when we are told, that "Our God is a consuming fire." The declaration that the Lord is "a holy and just God," has a different meaning from the encouraging assurance, that "He is merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." Yet these distinct attributes perfectly harmonize in the divine character, and only *seem* to limit each other: for the Lord is infinite in wisdom, justice, holiness, goodness, mercy, and truth; exactly as if each attribute subsisted alone in his incomprehensible nature.

We must not, however, imagine, when it is said, that God is love, or truth, or vengeance,

that these properties are so essential to him, that they cannot but act to the utmost in all possible cases; as fire cannot but burn, whether the effects be useful or destructive; or as water must rush downward, when obstructions are removed, whether it fertilize or deluge the country.—We should remember that he acts with most perfect freedom, and unerring wisdom, “according to the counsel “of his own will.” It is therefore impossible that any divine attribute could have been exercised in a greater degree, or in a different manner, than it has been: because the works of the Lord’s power, and the effects of his justice and love, have been exactly as many and great, as infinite wisdom determined they should be.

We may perhaps discover a faint illustration of the subject, in the conduct of two affluent persons, both apparently very liberal. The one not duly estimating the real value of riches, or the true ends of generosity, scatters abroad with a lavish hand, till he exhausts the very resources of his bounty; while his indiscriminate liberality often encourages vice, and does more harm than good to society. The other considers his wealth as an improvable talent: he gives and spends only when he judges that it will answer some good purpose; he frequently rejects importunate applications, but on other occasions he is bountiful without waiting to be solicited. He studies to exercise beneficence in consistency with justice, and to retain the ability

of permanent usefulness: he aims to render his liberality subservient to the best interests of mankind, and uniformly to discountenance sloth, profligacy, and ungodliness. And thus, while he seems to limit his bounty, he renders it more abundantly and durably useful, by regulating it with prudence and discretion.—In like manner the wisdom and justice of God may appear to restrain the exercise of his love; but they only direct it in that manner, which is most worthy and honourable to his name, and the best interest of his universal and everlasting kingdom.

It may therefore suffice in general to observe, that the Lord acts freely and according to his own perfections, and not by constraint, or reluctantly; that loving kindness is his peculiar honour, which adds lustre to all his other attributes; that he delighteth in goodness and mercy, and rejoiceth in his boundless power of communicating felicity; that he is not in any respect less holy, just, and true, than if he had shewn no mercy; and that it is impossible he should communicate more happiness, upon any other plan, than he actually will communicate in that way which his infinite wisdom hath devised, whatever ignorance or presumption may imagine or assert.

II. Then we proceed to illustrate the truth and importance of the doctrine contained in the text,

from the dealings of God with his creatures, especially with the human race.

This will be rendered very evident, by considering a gradation of events, in which the Lord hath exercised love and mercy, far beyond all that ever could have entered into the heart of man to conceive, had it not been revealed.

Let us then endeavour to realize, as far as such poor worms are able, the infinite and self-existent God, from all eternity possessed of essential glory and felicity, incapable of increase or diminution.

Thus circumstanced, he could have no other possible inducement but love, or a disposition to delight in communicating happiness, in creating the universe, and producing a vast variety of beings, capable of life and enjoyment. The inanimate creation was formed perfectly good, and exactly suited to the use and benefit of living creatures. The numerous orders of these, from the invisible animated atom to the bright Seraph before the throne, were all made complete in their kind, adapted to the place and design of their existence, and capable of a measure of enjoyment: and, except as sin has deranged the original constitution of infinite love, no creature is left destitute of a degree of happiness equal to its capacity. In meditating, however, on this subject, we must recollect, that "the creation groaneth and travaileth in pain," through the sins of man: his cruelty and

tyranny add immensely to the sufferings of innocent animals, and he is punished in them, as his property and the subjects of his original dominion.

It is also worthy of observation, that no rational creature has ever been deprived of an adequate felicity, except in the case of transgression; at least we have no intimation of this kind, either in the works or in the word of God. None has been degraded to an inferior situation, rendered uncertain in respect of the future, or distressed by terror, bitterness, or vanity. On the contrary, we have every reason to conclude, that the capacities of all obedient creatures continually expand; that their enjoyment proportionably increases; and that they all will become more and more blessed to all eternity. In these things surely GOD IS LOVE!

If the case of infants should be thought an exception, seeing they suffer and die without personal criminality; we may observe, without entering on an intricate controversy, that all who believe the Bible, must allow the human race to have become sinful and mortal by the fall of Adam; and they who reject revelation, will not find less difficulty than others, in accounting for the present condition of mankind.—If then every branch fell, when the root was overthrown; “if we are born in “sin and the children of wrath;” it behoves us to be silent on this subject, and to wait for the clearer light of the great decisive day. For indeed, it is highly probable, that the case of infants will then

appear not only consistent with the divine justice, in respect of their present sufferings, but one grand display of the divine mercy and goodness, in the felicity by which those sufferings were succeeded.

The Lord hath manifested his love, by condescending to become the moral Governor of his rational creatures. Infinite wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth, are indispensably requisite in the Sovereign of the universe. His government must be infinitely perfect, and of the highest possible advantage to all creatures. "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice:" for nothing, but enmity and rebellion, can be dissatisfied. The law also, being holy, just, and good, was dictated by perfect love. Like a wise and kind Father, the Lord requires us to love him with all our hearts, and to love others as ourselves: every other requirement may be readily resolved into these two great commandments; and if they were universally obeyed, universal harmony and felicity would be the consequence. Yet this is the law, against which the corrupt passions of man's heart rise in desperate enmity!—Who then can deny that GOD is LOVE?

But the law is enforced by an awful sanction, and it denounces an awful curse against every transgressor: what then shall we say to this? It would not perhaps be difficult to prove, that the punishments, threatened in the law and inflicted by the justice of God, result from love directed

by infinite wisdom: not love of the individuals, whose final condemnation is determined, but enlarged benevolence to universal being through eternal ages. This however, would carry us too far from our subject: it must therefore suffice to observe, that in the government of accountable creatures, who act voluntarily, and are influenced by motives, the denunciation of punishment must form a part of the system: and if this punishment be only inflicted on the disobedient, and do not exceed the heinousness of their crimes; while it tends to retain multitudes in obedience, and preserve the universe from the effects of general rebellion, it must prove a publick benefit, and consist with wise and holy love. That must be the most beneficent plan, which secures the greatest, most extensive, and permanent advantages to the most excellent part of moral agents: and the philosophical notion, that the felicity even of sinful creatures is the ultimate end proposed to himself by the Governor of the world, is not more repugnant to scripture, than to the common sense and opinion of mankind in similar cases. A wise ruler of a nation, in proportion as he loved his people, would be careful, by good laws impartially executed, to restrain the ill-disposed from injuring their fellow subjects, and disturbing the peace of the community: and if this made it necessary to punish with death some individuals, these would be considered as suffering for the publick good; and,

provided they deserved their doom, it would not be deemed an impeachment of his paternal love to his people. On the contrary, the prince, who under the plea of clemency should neglect to punish evil doers, and to protect his peaceable subjects, might indeed be the favourite of the fraudulent and rapacious, but his conduct would be reprobated by all honest men.

But as we are not capable of fully comprehending the plan of the divine government, let us turn our thoughts to another view of the subject.—The Lord hath shewn that he is love, in his dealings with sinful men, by his patience and providential bounty. Could we possibly witness all the crimes of every description, with all their aggravations, which are perpetrated in London, or any other large city, during a single day; could we see the malignity of every sin, and conceive of them all as committed against *us*, by persons on whom we had conferred the greatest favours; and did we possess the unrestrained power of executing vengeance; I am persuaded that our patience would be wearied out before evening. But the Lord at once sees all the sins committed in the whole world, together with the desperate wickedness of the human heart; he abhors, with unalterable and infinite hatred, every kind and degree of unholiness; he is able at any moment to punish sinners with irresistible vengeance; he could sustain no loss, if he destroyed all the workers of

iniquity; and he might do it consistently with most perfect justice. Yet he bears with the rebellions of mankind from age to age; he endures the provocations of guilty lands, during the course of revolving centuries, while their presumptuous ingratitude continually increases; he prolongs the lives of individuals to fifty, sixty, seventy, or eighty years, while they defy his justice, ridicule his works and word, or persecute to death his inoffensive worshippers! This is a very affecting illustration of the subject, and a convincing proof that **GOD IS LOVE.** “It is of the Lord’s mercies “that we are not consumed:” and besides the value of a reprieve to a condemned criminal, several of us are under unspeakable obligations to the long-suffering of our God; as he spared us during many years, when we lived in unrepented sin, that he might at length make us partakers of his great salvation.

But, as if exemption from deserved misery were a small matter, the Lord confers on sinful men an exuberance of temporal comforts and benefits. From year to year he fills the earth with his riches: summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, do not fail: things most necessary to the life of man, are most plentifully bestowed; but the revolving seasons bring us a constant succession of valuable productions, to regale us with an agreeable variety of indulgence: and though we too commonly abuse this bounty to the dishonour of the Giver,

every sense is liberally gratified with its proper object. The Lord holdeth our souls in life: his arm protects us, and his providence watches over us; while perhaps we proudly refuse to supplicate his favour, or ungratefully neglect to acknowledge his mercy. He defends us from sickness, or heals our infirmities; he corrects with gentleness, and seems in haste to relieve our distresses: he sometimes shews us the danger, that our deliverance may be the more affecting; but more frequently he spares us the alarm, though he knows this will render us less attentive to his kindness. In these, and various similar instances, “the Lord is loving unto every man:” “He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” “Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.”

These are, however, subordinate proofs that God is Love; and the apostle did not so much as stop to notice them; but with a beautiful abruptness hastened to select the grand illustration and demonstration of his doctrine: “In this was manifest the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein was love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” The Lord’s purpose of pardoning

sinners, and advancing them to a higher degree of glory and felicity than that from which they had fallen, is not considered as the grand proof that God is love; though the knowledge of him and of ourselves will convince us, that it is too vast for our capacities, and exceeds all computation: but *the means* of our recovery and reconciliation are represented as exhibiting a still more astonishing illustration of the subject. Could the blessings designed us have been honourably conferred by an act of sovereignty, without the intervention of a Mediator and an atoning sacrifice, as a prince pardons and then prefers a man who has been guilty of treason; the obligation would have been immense. But it appears that this was impossible, because the Lord cannot deny himself, or act inconsistently with his own perfections. When therefore, the honour of his law and justice seemed to place an insurmountable barrier to the exercise of pardoning mercy; when he could have glorified himself in the destruction of our rebellious race, and in creating worlds replenished with nobler inhabitants; that he should form and accomplish the plan of saving us by the incarnation and sufferings of his only-begotten Son, was most stupendous mercy! That he should do this unsolicited by sinners; yea, while they continued to harden their hearts in daring rebellion against him! That he should both purpose the design of reconciling the world to himself by the interposition of a

Surety; and, when the whole creation could not supply any being, whose dignity, love, and power, were adequate to the arduous and gracious undertaking; that he should so love the world, as to give his only, his well-beloved, Son, to assume the nature and become the Brother of apostate man, that he might be his Redeemer, by a life of suffering obedience, and an agonizing death upon the cross! In this, says the apostle, is love! It is the grandest display, that ever was, or ever will be made of God as Love. It exceeds, and swallows up all the thoughts of men; and even of angels, who desire to look down into these things with unceasing admiration and rapturous delight.

Let it also be carefully observed, that the centre of these adorable wonders of divine mercy is not fixed in the circumstance of Christ, as *incarnate*, dying on the cross for sinners; but in the *incarnation* of the only begotten Son of God, that he might thus suffer and die for them!

We now therefore consider the Saviour as come into the world; his name EMMANUEL, God with us; his humiliation, obedience, and sufferings accomplished. We next contemplate him rising from the grave, ascending into heaven, and in our nature appearing in the presence of God for us, as our High Priest and Advocate; exalted to the mediatorial throne, reigning over all creatures, and possessed of all power and fulness, for the salvation of every sinner who comes to God by him.

Had men known their real situation and character; and had it been intimated, that reconciliation to God, recovery to holiness, and admission to everlasting felicity might *possibly be attained*, by journeying to some remote inhospitable region, and performing certain arduous conditions: none would have acted *reasonably*, who hesitated to go in search of this invaluable advantage. In such a concern, all other pursuits ought to be relinquished or suspended, and every danger or hardship disregarded: no delay should be admitted, but all ought immediately to set out for the appointed place, and communicate the interesting report to others, till it spread through the whole earth, as the most rejoicing tidings, which ever reached the ears of sinful man.

But the Lord knew that we were not, thus *reasonable*; nay wholly indisposed to regard distant rumours, or to make inconvenient enquiries about salvation. He therefore, according to the purposes of his boundless love, appointed a number of reconciled sinners to execute the ministry of reconciliation, by going abroad into the world, and preaching the gospel to every creature. He invested them with miraculous powers, and inspired them with holy affections; he prepared them for patient sufferings and unwearied labours, and sent them with the glad tidings of his grace to sinners of every description, language, or climate. He ordered them not only to state and confirm the

truths of Christianity; but to warn, invite, persuade, expostulate, and beseech sinners, in his name, to be reconciled to God. In this embassy, the vilest blasphemer, oppressor, murderer, and persecutor, is included; not even the hoary-headed profligate is excepted! All things are ready: all men every where are commanded to repent, and invited to believe in the Son of God: nor is it possible that a sinner can want any thing which is not promised to all who seek it by earnest prayer.

Miraculous powers have indeed long since been withdrawn; but the same ministry of reconciliation is continued: nor does any thing at this day so much prevent the gospel from spreading throughout the earth, as the disinclination to receive it which is universally manifested. Every heart is closed against the divine message, by self-flattering prejudices and carnal affections; men of all nations and orders unite in opposing its admission among them; and the events, recorded in the Acts of the apostles, have in this respect taken place, again and again, as often as the unadulterated Gospel of Christ has been sent to those parts of the world, which were before unacquainted with it.

This may suggest a proper answer to the objections of infidels against revelation, on the ground of its not being universal. The Lord indeed is not bound to vouchsafe unmerited benefits to all, or to any of his creatures. “May he not do what

“ he will with his own?” The objection therefore is replete with presumption. Yet it may also be observed, that ministers are commissioned and instructed to use their utmost endeavours, that the knowledge of the gospel may be rendered universal; and that numbers have been, and still are, ready, at any personal risk, to attempt it: but the lusts of men raise such barriers against them, as nothing but Omnipotence can surmount or remove. Even in this *Christian* land, the genuine religion of the Bible scarcely ever finds admission into any place, but in the midst of opposition, contempt, and reproach: and no man should attempt to preach it, without standing prepared for degradation of character, or exclusion from preferments which he might otherwise have expected. Many friends to the truth are so influenced by this consideration, that they bring forward the peculiar doctrines of the gospel with cautious hand, in hopes to insinuate them almost imperceptibly: and few of those who now glory in the cross of Christ will deny, that once their hearts greatly disliked that humiliating subject.

Yet still, our God perseveres in sending his message to sinners, even forcing it upon their attention, and requiring his ministers to venture their scorn and resentment, by their intrusions and importunity! And at last, when the carnal heart still persists in rejecting the gracious proposal: “ of his great love wherewith he loved them, even

“ when they were dead in sin, he quickens them
“ by his grace; and makes them willing in the
“ day of his power.” When therefore we affirm
that GOD is Love, we may apply it, to the love of
the Father in giving his only Son to become our
Saviour; to the love of the Son, in assuming our
nature, coming into this sinful world, and dying
on the cross for our sins, that he might be our all-
prevailing Advocate; and to the love of the Spirit,
in regenerating, sanctifying, and comforting our
hearts: that so “ Glory may be to the Father, and
“ to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost: as it was in
“ the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world
“ without end: Amen.”

It would lead us too far to expatiate on the va-
rious instances of the Lord's unspeakable love to
his believing people; his condescending regard to
their minutest concerns; his tender sympathy
with them in all their trials; his readiness to for-
give even their renewed offences, and “ restore
to them the joy of his salvation;” his providen-
tial care in restraining their enemies, moderating
their temptations, supplying their wants, and an-
swering their prayers; his kind acceptance of
their feeble services; the consolations he affords
them, especially in trouble; and his marvellous
interposition in rendering their sufferings most
efficacious medicines, and the king of terrors a
messenger of peace. These and many other topicks

might be enlarged on, to illustrate the proposition that GOD IS LOVE. But we must,

III. Proceed to mention some perverse inferences which are frequently made from the text. 'If God be LOVE,' say some men, 'may we not conclude that he will not make his creatures miserable?' Now this strange inference not only contradicts the general tenour of scripture, the divine revelation of which it supposes; but it is refuted by undeniable facts: for most certainly sinful creatures do suffer many and great miseries. Not to mention the instances recorded in the sacred volume, concerning the Lord's dealings with fallen angels and sinful men; can we live in the world, and not both witness and feel the effects of the divine displeasure against transgressors? Are not whole cities and nations desolated by the scourge of war, or by famines, pestilences, and earthquakes? Do not various diseases continually sweep immense multitudes into the grave, after enduring most excruciating pains? Are not the survivors bereaved of their choicest comforts, and penetrated with exquisite anguish? Is not the earth, in every part, filled with sighs, tears, groans, and bitter complaints? And are not all these afflictions the appointment of God, as punishments of sin, comprised in the first sentence denounced on fallen man, "In sorrow shalt thou eat bread

“ all the days of thy life,—till thou return to the
 “ ground:—for dust thou art, and to dust shalt
 “ thou return ¹?”

These sufferings are indeed turned into blessings to believers, and they are often useful in bringing sinners to repentance; but in themselves they are miseries, and frequently arise by natural consequence from men's vices: so that it is most evident that God doth punish sin with great severity. Hence we may learn, that we cannot judge concerning his conduct, from our own duty in apparently similar cases. In our private capacity, we ought not to inflict misery, or withhold relief when we are able to afford it, on account of any provocations whatever: but the duty of magistrates, in respect of malefactors, much more resembles the case under consideration. We should however, frame to ourselves the most deplorable scenes imaginable; and then enquire whether a benevolent man would not have prevented or relieved such miseries, if it had been in his power? And the answer to this enquiry must convince every one, who does not deny the superintending providence of God, or blaspheme his name, that we are incompetent judges on such subjects.

Yet many, who will not argue against these conclusions, would infer from the text, that God will not make any of his creatures finally and eternally miserable. But the deduction ought to

¹ Gen. iii. 16—19.

be this: "GOD IS LOVE;" 'therefore he will not cause any creature to suffer, unless some wise, holy, and benevolent purpose can be answered by its sufferings.' It would not consist with infinite love to give one moment's *needless* uneasiness; and it may consist with infinite love to make sinners eternally miserable; if the glory of God, and the interests of the universe through eternal ages, render it indispensably necessary. Facts demonstrate, to all who allow God to be infinite in justice and goodness, that durable sufferings may be inflicted consistently with those perfections. Complicated and long-continued miseries are very common: and death, the most dreaded of all temporal evils, cannot possibly be avoided. This seems to bring matters to extremities: for if the greatest punishment which God hath threatened to inflict on sinners in this world, never fails to be executed; who can prove, or even probably conjecture, that the Lord will not accomplish his most tremendous denunciations of eternal misery? He is TRUTH as well as LOVE: and will any man seriously attempt to exalt his love by denying his truth? He hath said, that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven—in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction;" for "they shall go away into everlasting punishment".

¹ Matt. xxv, 46. 2 Thess. i, 8.

And surely “ God is not a man that he “ should lie—hath he said, and shall he not “ do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make “ it good¹?”

The grandest display of the love of God doth equally declare his justice and holiness: and will not men allow that he is Love, unless he will, as it were, abdicate his throne, dishonour his name, and neglect the interests of his obedient subjects, in order to preserve impenitent rebels from deserved punishment? These reflections ought rather to convince us, that there is a malignity in sin, of which men are not aware; seeing God so terribly threatens and severely punishes his offending creatures, and yet rescues a penitent remnant in so stupendous a manner.

But some still contend that God will save all *sincere* persons, each in his own way; and support this antisciptural opinion by the words of our text.—Leaving at present the case of those who never were favoured with the clear light of divine revelation: let it be observed, that if they, who are fully informed, or might be did they properly improve their advantages, persist in neglecting the way of salvation revealed in the scriptures to depend on their moral virtues, rational schemes, or self-invented observances; if they treat the truth of God as a lie, and count that wisdom which

¹ Numb. xxiii, 19.

angels adore, to be foolishness; if they regard the stupendous love of God in giving his Son to be the Saviour of the world as needless; and then pretend that he will condemn no man for unavoidable errors: let them look to it, for evil is before them. The whole scripture declares unbelief to be the offspring of pride, and the love of sin: and that such men continue under the unqualified sentence of final condemnation.

Sincerity is an ambiguous term: *sincerely* to hate infinite good and despise infinite excellency; and thus to be very *sincere* in fighting against God and persecuting his saints; nay, sincerity in supporting the tenets of philosophy and morality, or superstition, against the sure testimony of God, is very different from sincere repentance, faith in Christ, love of his people, and obedience to his commands. Yet men, either *artfully* or *ignorantly*, confound these distinct ideas; and then pretend that *sincerity* is all that is necessary to salvation.

But this short specimen must suffice: though many more false inferences from the text might be mentioned: the wise man has, however, summed them all up in one verse: "Because sentence against
" an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore
" the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in
" them to do evil¹."

¹ Eccles. viii, 11.

IV. Let us in the last place make some practical use of the subject.

The view of the unfathomable love of God, which hath been given, should increase men's abhorrence of sin and dread of its consequences. The more glorious and excellent the Lord appears to be, the greater degree of odiousness must be contained in every transgression against him; and crimes committed under the clear light of the gospel must, on that account, be peculiarly inexcusable. While, therefore, sinners should take warning to flee from the wrath to come, (for "how will they escape if "they neglect so great salvation," and harden themselves in disobedience, because our God is merciful?) it is incumbent on us all to humble ourselves more and more for all our numberless offences, as most hateful and unreasonable, because committed against infinite goodness and excellency.

On the other hand the subject is most delightfully suited to encourage the poor trembling penitent, how many or heinous soever his sins may have been. Poor desponding soul, remember that GOD IS LOVE. Consider what he hath done to make way for the honourable exercise of his mercy. There were two obstacles in the way of our felicity; namely, his justice and our proud obstinacy. He hath removed the former by "not sparing his own Son," but giving him a sacrifice

for our sins; and he overcomes the latter, when he “gives us repentance to the acknowledging of his truth.” If then thou dost now submit to his righteousness, confess thy sins, and apply for salvation, according to his merciful invitations; thou mayest assuredly expect a gracious reception: for he, who commended his love to his enemies, by giving his own Son to die for them, cannot reject the weeping contrite supplicant, who pleads the all-prevailing name of Jesus, in humble faith, and fervent desires of finding mercy and grace through him.

Here again we may learn the standard of true excellency. The most shining characters, which genius hath selected to immortalize, have commonly been illustriously mischievous; and the unqualified admiration, with which they are often mentioned, exceedingly misleads inexperienced youth. But GOD is LOVE; and the more we resemble and imitate him in this endearing attribute, the greater real excellency we unquestionably possess. Let us then be “followers of God,” and “walk in love,” after his pattern, in all the various displays of it which have been considered: then we shall certainly be known and approved as his children, and found meet for the eternal inheritance of his heavenly kingdom.

Finally, if we be conscious of having “fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us” in the gospel, let us receive the trials allotted us, as

the wise and holy appointments of divine love; let us not judge of the Lord's dispensations by our feelings or reasonings, but by his holy word: and let us submit to his will, whatever he may withhold, take away, or inflict; assured that he manages all our concerns in that manner, which is most conducive to our eternal interests, and best suited to illustrate the riches of his paternal liberality.

SERMON V.

ACTS, xxvi. 19, 20.

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

THE propriety and address of St. Paul's speech before Agrippa, Festus, and that august assembly, in whose presence he stood as the prisoner of Jesus Christ, have been generally admired: but the faithfulness and courage, with which he pleaded the cause of the gospel, are perhaps still more deserving of our attention. He paid no court to his illustrious auditors: he attempted not to ingratiate himself with them, or even to shun their contempt or aversion; while he used the most effectual means of convincing them, not only that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but

that faith in him was absolutely necessary to salvation, and that all men without exception ought to “repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

Having given a brief narration of his own miraculous conversion, he produced his commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles; “I have appeared unto thee,” says the divine Saviour,—“to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee: delivering thee from the people and the gentiles, to whom now I send thee; to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in me. Whereupon,” says the apostle, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but shewed,” first to the Jews and then to the gentiles, “that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.” In doing this, “he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision: for in his view of Christianity, these practical subjects perfectly accorded with the doctrines of faith and grace. The several Christian graces may, and should, be *distinguished*, as they have their appropriate nature and use; but they cannot be *separated* in the person who possesses them. For instance, an impenitent believer,

and an unbelieving penitent are ideal characters : true faith is a penitent faith, and true repentance is believing repentance : yet the nature and use of repentance and faith should plainly be distinguished. This will appear more evidently, while from the text we take occasion to consider,

I. The importance of the subject, as it appears from the scriptures.

II. Certain things which are implied in it.

III. The peculiar nature of repentance and turning unto God.

IV. And lastly. The works meet for repentance.

I. Let me call your attention, my brethren, to the importance or prominence of this subject, as it appears from the scriptures, especially from the new Testament.

John the Baptist was the predicted forerunner of the Messiah, who was sent to prepare the way of the Lord, when he came in human nature among his ancient people the Jews : but how did he execute his important office ? He came preaching, “ Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Let me intreat your serious attention to

this circumstance:—notwithstanding the advantages of that favoured nation, with all their notions and form of godliness; there was no order of men, no religious sect, no individual whatever, that did not want repentance, as a preparation for welcoming the Messiah, and sharing the blessings of his spiritual kingdom. Insomuch, that the Baptist said to the Pharisees, as well as to the Sadducees, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father’.” Not long after, our Lord himself condescended to preach the gospel; and he too said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” When the apostles went forth at his command, they “preached every where that men should repent:” and it appears from part of his discourse to the seventy disciples, that they were charged with the same commission; for he said on that occasion, “Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida; for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been in thee, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes².”

Does our Lord say in one place, “The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was

¹ Matt. iii. 7—10,

² Luke, x. 10—14.

“lost?” He elsewhere explains it, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Does the good Shepherd rejoice and call his friends to rejoice with him, when he has brought home the lost sheep? “So likewise is there joy in heaven,” even “among the angels of God.” “over one sinner that one that repenteth:” and when the prodigal, returning to his father, was graciously welcomed, all the family was called on to rejoice; “for this, my son, was lost and is found, was dead and is alive.”

On the other hand Christ “*upbraided* the cities, “in which his mighty works had been done, because they repented not.” He told the people, “that the men of Nineveh would rise up in judgment with that generation and condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas: and behold a greater than Jonas is here.” He warned the Jews that “except they repented, they would all likewise perish.” And he summed up the reasons of his gentleness to notorious sinners, and his severity in rebuking the Pharisees, in this remarkable passage:—“A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first and said, “Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented and went. And he came to the second and said likewise: and he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They

“ say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them,
 “ Verily I say unto you, the publicans and harlots
 “ go into the kingdom of heaven before you.
 “ For John came to you in the way of righteous-
 “ ness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans
 “ and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had
 “ seen it, *repented* not afterwards, that *ye might*
 “ *believe him!*”

When our Lord was risen, and about to ascend unto the Father, he said to his apostles, “ Go ye,
 “ preach the gospel to every creature: he that
 “ believeth and is baptized shall be saved; and he
 “ that believeth not, shall be damned.” And again, “ Thus it is written, and thus it behoved
 “ Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the
 “ third day; and that repentance and remission
 “ of sins should be preached in his name unto all
 “ nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” We may know how the apostles understood their Lord, after they were filled with the Holy Ghost, if we attend to Peter, on the day of Pentecost, thus addressing the convinced Jews, “ Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins:” and afterwards “ Repent and be converted, *that your sins may be blotted out;*” not *because your sins are blotted out*, as some modern systems seem to require: and why should men alter the order of scriptural exhor-

¹ Matt. xxi. 28—32. ² Mark, xvi. 15, 16. Luke, xxiv. 46, 47.

tations, unless they mean to change the doctrine of scripture¹?

When Peter related the circumstances of Cornelius's conversion, to his brethren at Jerusalem, they made this remark, "Then hath God also to the gentiles granted repentance unto life²." When Paul at Athens, before the celebrated council of Areopagus, boldly exposed the ignorance of this renowned seat of pagan philosophy, he said, "The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth *all men every where* to repent³." And stating the substance of his preaching before the elders of Ephesus, he thus expressed himself, "Testifying, both to the Jews and also to the Gentiles, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ⁴."

The same apostle, addressing the unbelieving Jews, thus expostulates with them, "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath⁵?" To the Corinthians he says, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of." And he expressed his fears that when he came among them he should "lament many, which had sinned and had not repented⁶."

¹Acts ii. 38. iii. 13. ²Acts, xi. 18. ³Acts, xvii. 30.

⁴Acts, xx. 21. ⁵Rom. iii. 4, 5. ⁶2 Cor. vii 10. xii. 21.

When he described the case of those who had sinned beyond the reach of mercy, he says it is "impossible to renew them to repentance:" and on the other hand he directed Timothy "in meekness to instruct those that opposed themselves, "if peradventure God would give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." Where it is particularly to be remarked that *repentance* is considered as an essential preparation of mind for the reception of the truth, in order that they may "recover themselves out of the snare of "the devil, who have been taken captive by him at "his will¹." And this agrees with Peter's advice to Simon Magus, "Repent of this thy wickedness "and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thy "heart may be forgiven thee²."

These testimonies may probably be deemed more than sufficient: but let it be remembered, that we are not only concerned to prove the truth of the doctrine; it is also requisite to shew that repentance is indispenably necessary to salvation, and has been a matter of the last importance in religion under every dispensation. I shall however, only select one passage from the Old Testament, with which to conclude this part of our subject. "I "will judge you, every one according to your "ways, saith the Lord God: repent and turn "yourselves from all your transgressions; so ini-

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. Heb. vi. 6. ² Acts, viii. 22.

“quity shall not be your ruin. Cast from you
 “all your transgressions, whereby ye have trans-
 “gressed, and make you a new heart and a new
 “spirit, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?
 “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that
 “dieth, saith the Lord God; therefore repent, and
 “turn ye!”—Let us then consider,

II. Certain things, which are implied in the language of the text, “That men should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

It is evidently implied in these words, that all men have sinned. God would never require any one to repent, who had never offended: yet “he commands all men every where to repent.” Sin is the transgression of the divine law, either by omission or commission, by defect or redundance, in thought, word, or deed. Few indeed of the human race are acquainted with the full extent and spirituality of this perfect rule: yet all know more than they practise. Every man’s conscience therefore must testify, if he allow himself time for reflection, that he hath often wilfully neglected his known duty and acted contrary to the conviction of his own mind, for the sake of some worldly object.

* Eze. xviii. 30—32.

But "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;" and not merely against a few scandalous and enormous crimes. Many painful effects of the divine displeasure are experienced during the present life, which universally terminate in death: then the sinner's "body returns to the dust whence it was taken, and the soul returns to God that gave it." Criminals suffer many things previous to their trial; but the principal punishment is subsequent to condemnation: thus "it is appointed to men once to die, and after death the judgment:" and we are "warned to flee from the wrath to come," from which Jesus delivers his people, who must suffer and die like other men. The connexion therefore between sin and future condemnation to everlasting punishment, which cannot be escaped without repentance, is clearly implied in the language of the text.

Nor should we forget, that this condemnation is *merited*; for unless sin deserves the punishment denounced, there can be no free mercy in remitting it. When the apostles were sentenced to stripes or death, for preaching the gospel, they might lament the injustice of the magistrates, but they could not repent of their own conduct in "obeying God rather than men." Such persons as deem the laws of any country iniquitous, and their governors oppressive, will complain when they suffer for disobedience; but they cannot

repent, unless they be convinced that they have been criminal. It would carry us too far, to illustrate the justice of God in the sentence pronounced against transgressors, by stating the rebellion, ingratitude, and enmity, which more or less connect with all our violations of the divine law: but surely, if crimes against our fellow creatures may deserve death; sins against our infinitely glorious Creator merit a punishment proportionably more dreadful. It is not commonly supposed that malefactors are sufficiently impartial, even if in other respects competent, to decide on the equity of the laws, or to amend the criminal code. It becomes us, therefore, rather to submit to the justice of God, and to supplicate his mercy, than to reply against him, as if we "would condemn him that we may be justified."

Our text implies likewise, that all have turned away from God. The characters of men are greatly diversified, but all "have forsaken the Fountain of living waters, to hew out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water." Apostacy from God, or a refusal to render him the worship, love, gratitude, and obedience which he demands; alienation of heart from him, and a disposition to seek happiness any where, rather than in his favour and service, are universal. "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way." All men are become idolaters; they desire and delight su-

premely in the creature, in one form or other, while a self-sufficient independent spirit, a proneness to self-admiration, and to seek our own will or glory, as the ultimate end of all our actions, constitutes another kind of universal idolatry. Hence the necessity of repenting and turning to God, as the supreme object of our love, and the source of our felicity.

But we must also observe, that the text contains an intimation of mercy, and of the way in which the returning sinner may approach God with full confidence of a gracious reception. When a company of malefactors have been convicted on the clearest evidence of the most atrocious crimes; a command from their prince to own their guilt and apply for mercy in a prescribed way, would be considered as an encouragement to expect a pardon. A hope would spring up in every breast; and if any who had unreservedly complied with this injunction, should at last be led to execution, they would think themselves trifled with, however just their punishment might otherwise be. Now the Lord hath revealed himself as infinitely merciful to the fallen race of men; he hath opened "a new and living way," for our approach to him upon a throne of grace; he hath invited us to draw near, and plead the name of our heavenly Advocate, and the merits of his atoning sacrifice; "he hath commanded all men every where to repent:" and from these things we confidently infer, that

every one, without exception, who ‘through ‘grace obeys the call,’ will be saved, by the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus. In short, if any man were sinless, and had no need of repentance; or if any were so sinful that repentance would avail him nothing; the general language of the text would not be suited to the case: but as all have sinned, and “with the Lord there is mercy “and plenteous redemption;” as no impenitent sinner can be saved, and no true penitent can be lost; therefore all men are exhorted and commanded to repent and turn to God, and do “works meet for repentance.

III. Then we proceed to consider the peculiar nature of repentance and turning unto God.

The parable of the prodigal son was evidently intended as an illustration of this important subject: and the following verse is a most suitable introduction to our discussion of it. “*When he came to himself,* he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!” He had been infatuated, he had acted as one in a delirium, or insane: but now the disorder is removed, he awakes as out of sleep, recovers the use of his faculties, and perceives his misery and danger. He sees every object in a new light; he forms a very different judgment of his father’s conduct, and the

rules and privileges of his family; of his own perverse behaviour, of his associates in vice, and in short of every thing connected with his character, situation, and prospects. From this revolution in his judgment, a total alteration takes place in his conduct. He considers the meanest servant of his father as comparatively happy, and himself as a wretched outcast deservedly perishing. His only hope in this extreme distress arises from a persuasion of the tender compassion of his father, whom before he had regarded as opposing his happiness: and he determines at all events to return to him, and seek to be reconciled, as the only hope of escaping destruction.

Thus the sinner, having long thought the Lord a hard Master, and religion a wearisome service; and in vain sought liberty and pleasure in sin and folly; at length, by rich mercy, is brought to himself, recovers from his delirium or fascination, to see his misery and lament his madness. Now he perceives that God is worthy of all love, obedience, and adoration; that his law is holy, just, and good; that his service is perfect freedom, and his favour, life and felicity; and that sin is but another name for folly, bondage, and ruin. He is convinced that the poorest believer is far happier than the most prosperous of the wicked, that his past conduct calls for the deepest humiliation, that his present situation is perilous in the extreme, and that his only refuge is in the compassion of that

God, against whom he hath ungratefully rebelled. Influenced by such considerations, he arises from his grovelling indulgences and low pursuits; he repents and turns to God, with humble confessions and fervent prayers; he struggles through difficulties, resists temptations, and rises above dark desponding fears; and finds our heavenly Father far more ready to pardon, welcome, and bless him, than he could possibly have expected.

Yes, my brethren, many of you know the meaning of this parable by your own happy experience: and comparing the bitterness of your sinful courses, with the peace and joy which you have found in believing; you are ready to say to others, "Come, taste and see how gracious the Lord is, and how blessed they are that trust in him."—But are there not also among you some persons who never thus "came to themselves?" and have no acquaintance with the change that hath been described?—A few instances may indeed occur, where repentance and conversion have begun so early in life, and been matured so gradually, as to leave no distinct traces of this experience: but they who are strangers to it, are almost universally ignorant of vital Christianity and its saving efficacy. True converts, however imperceptible their progress, are always conscious of desires and dispositions, not natural to fallen man; and they are more prone to question, whether a change, wrought quietly and gradually, can be

genuine; than to suppose a more distinct awakening to a sense of guilt and danger not before felt, to be in general unnecessary.

This "coming to themselves," is often attended with alarm and terror, (which, however, are not at all essential to repentance;) and it is always productive of godly sorrow; a deep and unfeigned concern for having offended our great and glorious Creator, broken his good laws, acted so foolish and base a part, and done so much injury to our neighbours and relatives. This is likewise connected with self-abasement, lowly thoughts of ourselves, and a disposition to plead guilty before God, and confess our sins unreservedly, with shame and remorse. Thus the Lord speaks of penitent Ephraim by his holy prophet. "I have surely
 "heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast
 "chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock
 "unaccustomed to the yoke. Turn thou me, and
 "I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.
 "Surely after I was turned, I repented; and after
 "I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was
 "ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did
 "bear the reproach of my youth'."—The effects of repentance are described after a similar manner in Ezekiel: "That thou mayest remember and be
 "confounded, and never open thy mouth any
 "more for thy shame, when I am pacified towards

* Jer. xxxi, 18—20.

“ thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord
 “ God.” For “ he looketh upon men, and if any
 “ say I have sinned, and perverted that which is
 “ right, and it profited me not, he shall deliver his
 “ soul from going down into the pit, and his life
 “ shall see the light” “ He that covereth his sins
 “ shall not prosper; but he that confesseth and
 “ forsaketh them shall find mercy.” The return-
 ing prodigal makes no excuse for his conduct, but
 says, “ Father, I have sinned against heaven and
 “ before thee, and am no more worthy to be called
 “ thy son.” And “ the publican, who smote on
 “ his breast, and cried, God be merciful to me a
 “ sinner, went home justified,” rather than the
 Pharisee that despised him. These are strong in-
 stances, which objectors would do well to recon-
 sider.

While men continue to boast, to palliate their
 conduct, to throw the blame on others, or to at-
 tempt making amends for their sins, they are not
 truly penitent: but when their excuses are silenced,
 and they condemn themselves without reserve, they
 begin to shew a temper of mind suited to their
 situation and character. And never was food more
 grateful to one perishing with hunger, or liberty
 more welcome to the poor prisoner than the gospel
 of Christ is to every broken-hearted penitent.
 He may be exercised with doubts of its truth, or

¹ Ezek. xvi, 69.

² Job, xxxiii, 27, 28.

entertain notions partial or erroneous of its freeness and sufficiency: but as the grand obstacle to believing is removed, this preparation of heart making way for fuller illumination and conviction, he will soon most cordially approve and embrace the doctrine of salvation by the cross of Christ.

For the true penitent abhors and detests his sins; he despises and rejects the wages and pleasures of iniquity; he casts away with loathing all his transgressions, and dreads a relapse into them as the most dire calamity; and he renounces all other hopes of salvation, along with his former pursuits and connexions, that he may seek liberty and happiness in the favour and service of his reconciled God. His former alienation is removed; he returns to him as his Rest and Refuge; and through many conflicts and discouragements, he comes to God, to yield himself to his service, to become his spiritual worshipper, and, “as bought with a price to glorify him, in body and in spirit, which are his.”

In this manner all men are commanded to “repent and turn to God,” from their worldly idols and sinful pursuits!—And do you not find, my friends, that in keeping at a distance from the Fountain of living waters, you prolong your own distress and disappointment? Do none of you, while striving against conviction, or cleaving to your lusts and pleasures, and refusing to humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God,

experience such disquietude as the Psalmist has described? “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long: for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought in summer.” Why should you pertinaciously refuse to hearken to the voice of Christ, and the admonitions of your own consciences? Why refuse to draw near to God, that he may draw near unto you? Do you not sometimes feel, though unwilling to own it, that the warnings and counsels of your ministers are reasonable, and that it would be your highest interest to comply with them? Are you not ready to say, “Go thy way at this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee?” But why do you delay to apply for relief, and embrace happiness? Have you not found the world to be vain and vexatious, and the pleasures of sin bitter and painful? Have not all endeavours to establish your own righteousness, or overcome your own passions, habits, and temptations, proved wearisome and unsuccessful? Hear then the words of the sinner’s Friend, while he speaks to you in accents of the tenderest love. “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness,

“ Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and
 “ your soul shall live.” “ Seek ye the Lord, while
 “ he may be found; call ye upon him while he is
 “ near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the
 “ unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him re-
 “ turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy
 “ upon him, and to our God, for he will abun-
 “ dantly pardon¹.” Confess your sins, therefore,
 without reserve; forsake them without delay, re-
 nounce your former associates in ungodliness;
 “ Come out from among them, and be ye separate,
 “ and touch not the unclean thing, and I will
 “ receive you, and will be a Father to you, and ye
 “ shall be my sons and my daughters, saith the Lord
 “ Almighty².” Cleanse your hands, ye sinners;
 “ and purify your hearts, ye double-minded; be
 “ afflicted, and mourn and weep; let your laughter
 “ be turned into mourning, and your joy into
 “ heaviness; humble yourselves in the sight of the
 “ Lord, and he shall lift you up³.” Make no more
 vain excuses; pretend not that your sins have been
 few or small; be not afraid to view them in their
 full magnitude and malignity; trust only in the
 mercy of the Father, the atoning blood and pre-
 vailing mediation of the Son, and the powerful
 grace of the holy Spirit; return to the Lord with
 weeping and supplications; and speedily your

¹ Isai. lv. 6, 7.

² 2 Cor. vi, 17, 18.

³ Jam. iv, 6—10.

sorrows shall be turned into joy, and your heaviness into glad songs of grateful praise.

But men not only should “repent and turn to God;” we must also call on them to do works meet for repentance; and this leads us,

IV. To consider what is meant by this clause of the text.

If a man truly repent of any misconduct, which hath proved injurious to himself or others, he would be glad, were it possible, to undo what he recollects with shame and remorse. This is indeed impracticable; yet frequently the effects may be prevented or counteracted; and this is a work meet for repentance, especially if it be done with much loss and self-denial. This consideration, however, may suggest a powerful inducement to early piety; for even if the sinner should be spared, and live to repent in his riper years, he will seldom be able to prevent the mischievous effects of his youthful iniquities; and that, which is practicable and indispensable, will resemble “the cutting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right eye.”

He who has in any way defrauded others, cannot be thought “to do works meet for repentance,” unless he makes restitution to the best of his ability and recollection; whatever mortifying or

self-denying circumstances attend it: for without this, *he retains the wages of his crimes, and perpetuates his injustice.* But as one vice often wastes the gains of another, restitution may be absolutely impracticable; and in many cases it is almost impossible to know to whom restitution should be made, even if a man is able and willing to make it. When therefore the apostle says, “Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hand the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth^r,” he seems to counsel such persons to submit to hard labour and mean fare, that by giving to the poor, they might make such restitution, as their circumstances allowed of: and this is certainly a work meet for repentance. Were this lowly, industrious, and self-denying conduct more common among professors of the gospel; they would more frequently be enabled to adorn the doctrine of Christ by an unrequired restitution for wrongs, which the laws of men do not notice, but which a tender well-informed conscience cannot overlook. And when wrong has been done, and the individuals who have been injured cannot be exactly ascertained, the poor, especially of the families which have been wronged, should be considered as best entitled to the restitution. This however, is certain, that the professed penitent himself, whether he

^r Eph. iv. 28.

have defrauded individuals or the publick, cannot retain it, either as a treasure to hoard up, or as a source of indulgence, without “ putting an accursed thing among his own stuff, and becoming “ an accursed thing like unto it’.”—But we may have traduced the characters, poisoned the principles, or corrupted the morals of others, or in various ways injured them, if we have not robbed them of their property: and though adequate restitution cannot be made; yet we should do all in our power to counteract the effects of our misconduct, and to promote their best interests; if we would evidence the sincerity of our repentance and faith, and of our love to God and man.

He that well understands the gospel of Christ, and the nature of genuine repentance, will readily perceive, that forgiveness of injuries, and love of enemies, are peculiarly required by the words of the text. The man who refuses to forgive, surely forgets his own need of forgiveness. And he, who will do nothing for his enemies, can have no proper sense of his own sinfulness, and of the love of God in reconciling us when enemies by the death of his Son. The view, which the true penitent has of Christ, dying on the cross and praying for his murderers, will render it easy to him, to pity and love his most determined foes, to do good to them that hate him, and pray for them that despitefully

† Josh. vii. 11—15.

use him and persecute him. These too are works meet for repentance; without which all tears, confessions, and even restitution, can never prove it genuine and unfeigned.

Patience under afflictions, contentment in our situation, thankfulness for mercies, and meekness under provocations, might be separately considered, did time permit. But in general, an habitual walk in newness of life, comprises the whole. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation; teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;” watching and praying against the sins which once had most entire dominion over us; redeeming our time and improving our talents, doing good to all men, especially to the household of faith; a circumspect conduct, and a constant attendance on the ordinances of God; a humble deportment in the family and community, as well as in the church; and a care to “exercise ourselves daily to have a conscience void of offence, towards God and man:” these I say are works meet for repentance.

—When the people asked John Baptist what they should do, in compliance with his exhortation to this effect; he did not require them to retire into deserts, or immure themselves in cloysters, nor even to torment themselves with excessive austerities: but he recommended liberal charity, strict inte-

grity, and a harmless and exemplary conduct even in the station of publicans and soldiers.

But these hints must suffice, as every reflecting person will be able to branch out the general rules laid down, into a variety of particulars; and the grand use of preaching is, to lead men to reflection.

Perhaps, however, I am addressing some persons, who still object to the subject; and confiding in the rectitude of their hearts, and the undeviating virtue of their conduct, count the doctrine of repentance and conversion wholly foreign to their case. I have heard persons of this description gravely observe, that ‘it would be much better to preach the necessity of a good life, than to dwell on repentance; except among the refuse of the species, of whom indeed little hope could be entertained.’ But how can such men help seeing, that they only repeat the objections of the Pharisees against Christ himself, and exactly resemble these antient opposers of the gospel? I would however, at present only say; If any one of you had a son, whom you had tenderly treated from his birth, and who should yet act with as much disregard to your counsel and authority, as you have done to those of your Creator, would you not think that he ought to repent of his ungrateful behaviour? And have you then no cause for repentance? Verily whatever you may think, it will hereafter appear, that there “is joy in heaven over

“ one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety
 “ and nine such just persons that need no repent-
 “ ance.” But does any one say, ‘ I own in general
 ‘ that I ought to repent; yet I find a strange insen-
 ‘ sibility of conscience, and backwardness to hum-
 ‘ ble myself before God, or to renounce the plea-
 ‘ sures of sin; and a grievous propensity to delay
 ‘ the necessary business, till my alarms and convic-
 ‘ tions vanish without any abiding effect.’ To
 you, my friend, I would observe that repentance
 is the gift of God; and that Jesus is exalted “ to
 “ give repentance and remission of sins.” Pray
 therefore to the Lord to ‘ give you repentance and
 his holy Spirit:’ cry in the language of Ephraim,
 “ Turn thou me, and I shall be turned;” and beg
 of him to take away the heart of stone, and to give
 the heart of flesh. Meditate also continually on
 the sufferings of Christ, the dignity of the sufferer,
 and the exhibition God hath given us, in that
 great transaction, both of his holy hatred of sin,
 and his compassionate love of sinners. This is the
 most effectual cure for a hard heart and an unfeel-
 ing conscience. “ I will pour upon them the Spirit
 “ of grace and supplication, and they shall look
 “ on me whom they have pierced, and mourn.”

But remember that life is uncertain; God, whom
 thou provokest, especially by impenitence, is the
 arbiter of thy life and death. The Holy Ghost

³ Zech. xii. 10.

“saith, To day if you will hear his voice harden not your hearts.” Even if your days should be prolonged, you may be given over to final obduracy, and continuance in sin will be sure to increase the anguish of repentance, should you at last, by a miracle of mercy, be plucked as a brand out of the burning.

Above all, my fellow sinners, beware lest you be deceived with a false repentance, for nothing so effectually hardens men in impenitence. Some transient convictions, fears and sorrows, some partial reformation; a new creed, sect, or form of religion; enthusiastick joys and comforts, or delusive fancies of visions and revelations, frequently satisfy men’s consciences and fill them with spiritual pride, while their hearts remain unchanged, the root of sin unmortified, and no works are found meet for repentance!—Beware also of the partial despairing repentance of Judas, the temporary repentance of king Saul, the extorted repentance of Pharaoh, and the case of him who was almost persuaded to be a Christian.—Nor let it be imagined, that repentance and conversion to God are confined to the beginning of a religious profession: for as long as we continue sinful and prone to depart from the Lord, they must constitute our habitual practice, form the dispositions of our hearts, and influence all our tempers and our conduct.

On the other hand, let not the contrite mourner for sin despond: remember, poor trembling penitent, that “there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” Yea, the Lord of angels, “sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied.” Only beseech Him that thy repentance may be genuine and thy conversion entire; thus thou wilt surely find that he is ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy; and ere long thou wilt joyfully sing, “O Lord, I will praise thee; though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away and thou comfortest me.” “For they that sow in tears shall reap in joy.” “Let then the hearts of those rejoice that seek the Lord.”

Finally, my Christian brethren, while you are careful in other respects to do works meet for repentance: let me exhort you to enter into the spirit of the gospel by using every means and encouraging every endeavour, to bring sinners to repentance; and to welcome every penitent with cordial joy and affection, as Ananias did the converted persecutor, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight.” Thus you will manifest the excellency of your principles, and be honoured as instruments in promoting that cause, for which the divine Saviour came into the world and shed his blood upon the cross; and all men will know that you are his true disciples.

SERMON VI.

2 CORINTHIANS, v. 17.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.

THE dangers, to which the church at Corinth was exposed from plausible false teachers, obliged the apostle to use such methods of re-establishing his authority, as he apprehended might be misunderstood and censured: he therefore says, "Whether we be beside ourselves it is to God, or whether we be sober it is for your cause."—The zealous servants of God have constantly been slighted and despised, as "beside themselves;" nay, the Son of God, the perfection of wisdom and excellency, was involved in the same charge, even by his friends and relations, as well as by his enemies¹. The apostle therefore would not be greatly

¹ 2 Kings, ix, 11. Jer. xxix, 26, 27. Hos. ix, 7. Mark, iii, 21. John, x, 20.

disquieted, when, not only Festus said, "Paul thou art beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad," but when his Corinthian converts concurred in the same sentiment.

' But, says the apostle, ' Both the ardour that gives occasion to such imputations, and the wisdom which regulates its effects, spring from regard to the glory of God, and affectionate longing after your souls: ' " For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh; yet now henceforth know we him no more." Even the brethren or nearest friends of Christ himself, according to the flesh, might not be regarded by the apostles, in dispensing instructions, reproofs, censures, or encouragements; but they were constrained by love to him who had died for them, to do all things with unbiassed impartiality. In like manner, no ties of blood, friendship, or even gratitude, must influence the servant of Christ, in the discharge of his pastoral office. In this respect even relations, benefactors, and patrons, must be disregarded, if we would approve ourselves to be indeed the genuine successors of the apostles in the sacred ministry.

“Therefore,” saith St. Paul, “if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new; and all things are of God who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ.”

The text suggests the following subjects to our consideration.

I. The apostle’s description of a real Christian; “If any man be *in Christ*.”

II. The change, which every real Christian has experienced, “He is a new creature.”

III. The effects of this change, “Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.”

I. Then we consider the apostle’s description of a real Christian, “If any man be *in Christ*.”

This expression may appear singular to many who are called Christians, but it is the uniform language of the new Testament: and “if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” New terms imperceptibly introduce new doctrines; nor has any subtilty of Satan or his servants better succeeded, in “privily bringing in damnable heresies,” than that of modernizing the language of divinity.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are *in Christ Jesus*.” “I knew a man *in Christ* fourteen years ago.” “He was also *in Christ* before me.” Of whom are ye *in Christ* Jesus, who of God is made unto us, wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption¹. “That we might be made the righteousness of God *in him*.” Many of the epistles also are addressed “to the saints *in Christ Jesus*,” “or to the church—in God the Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ.”—Which accords to the language of the prophet, “Israel shall be saved *in the LORD* with an everlasting salvation.” “Surely shall one say, *In the LORD* have I righteousness and strength.” “*In the LORD* shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory².”

The apostle John also employs similar expressions; “And now, little children, abide *in him*.” “We are *in him* that is true, even *in his Son Jesus Christ*.” But the words of our Lord himself are most decisive; “He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth *in me* and I in him⁴.” Accordingly when we administer the Lord’s supper, that outward sign of this inward life of faith in a crucified Saviour, we pray ‘that we may so eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood;—that we may *dwell in him and he in us*.’—

¹ Rom. viii, 1. xvi. 7. 1 Cor. i. 30. 2 Cor. xii. 2.

² Is. xlv. 17, 24, 25. ³ 1 John ii. 28, v. 20. ⁴ John vi. 56.

“Neither,” saith our divine Redeemer, when interceding for his disciples, “pray I for these alone, “but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, “as thou, Father, art *in me, and I in thee, that “they also may be one in us*.”

But we must explain this language and shew its propriety and energy; lest it should be thought, that the whole argument rests upon our translation of the original particles. St. Paul says, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of “God is eternal life *through,*” or *in* “Christ “Jesus our Lord:” And St. John, “This is the “record that God hath given to us eternal life, “and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son “hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God “hath not life².” The salvation of Christ is completed, as far as his mediatory work is concerned: but who are they that shall eventually be “saved “from wrath by him?” To this question the scripture answers with the most decided precision; “they that receive him,” “they that believe in “him,” “they that are found *in him*.”—Union with Christ is necessary in order to communion with him: he saves all those, and those only, who thus stand related to him.

According to the illustrations of scripture, the believer is *in Christ*, as the stone is in the

¹ John xvii. 20—23.

² Rom. vi. 23. 1 John v. 11, 12.

building. God is preparing a spiritual temple, in which he may dwell and be glorified for ever. The person of Christ is the precious Foundation and Corner-stone of this temple, and believers “come to him, and as living stones are built up a “spiritual house,” “and habitation of God through “the Spirit.” But this emblem, taken from things wholly inanimate, only represents our dependence on Christ, and consecration to God through him: we therefore learn more fully the nature of this mystical union, by the parable of the vine and its branches. Mere nominal Christians continue unfruitful; and at length are taken away, withered, and gathered to be burned: but true believers are vitally united to him, and abide in him by the quickening and fructifying influences of the Holy Spirit². Yet even this illustration falls short of fully elucidating the subject; nay, the nearest of all relative unions does not entirely answer to it; for believers are *in Christ*, as the members are in the human body. He is the Head of the church, and every Christian is a part of his mystical body, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, and the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers, as the life and soul of this mystical body. They live spiritually by virtue of this union with their Head; they are placed under his guidance and authority; have one common interest,

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 4—8. Eph. ii. 20—22. ² John xv. 1—8.

and fill up their stations in the church for the benefit of the whole¹. According to the remarkable words of the apostle, “ I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.”—“ Your life is hid with Christ in God; when Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory².”

There is, however, another way of illustrating the subject, which may help us to explain the way in which sinners attain to so high an honour, and so blessed a distinction. The believer is *in Christ*, as Noah was in the ark. “ By faith Noah being warned of God was moved with fear, and prepared an ark³.” He believed the sure testimony of God, both respecting the deluge and the appointed method of preservation; he feared the impending judgment, and revered the justice and power of God; and thus he was moved to follow his directions. To prepare the ark was a vast undertaking: his labour and expence must have been exceedingly great, and his perseverance, amidst the scorn and hatred of an unbelieving world, most exemplary.—But when the deluge came, he was found *in the ark*, and preserved to be the progenitor of a new race of men; and even of the promised Redeemer, on whom doubtless his faith had ultimately been placed: while all the rest

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 12—31. ² Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 3, 4.

³ Heb. xi. 7. 1 Pet. iii. 20.

of the human species, however distinguished, or to whatever refuges they fled, were swept away with one common desolation. But had he bestowed as much pains and expence, in building a lofty tower on a high mountain, following the dictates of his own wisdom; he would have shared the common doom; as they will, who "go about to establish their own "righteousness," instead of diligently seeking the salvation of God. For like Noah, the sinner, hearing of "the wrath of God revealed from heaven "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," believing the divine record "is moved with fear," and takes warning to flee from the wrath to come. He hears also of Christ, the true Ark, which God himself hath provided; and renouncing all other confidences, by faith he betakes himself to this sure refuge, applies for admission, and endures the self-denial, contempt, and persecution to which this may expose him. And whatever difficulties he may now encounter; his wisdom will be acknowledged and his felicity envied, when no unbeliever shall find any shelter from the overwhelming deluge of divine vengeance, which perhaps he now despises or blasphemes.

Under the Mosaick dispensation, the *guiltless* man-slayer was exposed to the sword of the avenger of blood: but cities of refuge were provided, to which he might flee for shelter.—Yet in this perilous situation an Israelite had no choice: he must scarcely turn back to take his clothes, and

by no means go home to bid farewell to his dearest relatives: he must leave all his outward comforts, employments, and interests: he must flee without delay, and hardly stop for necessary refreshment: he must not yield to indolence, or sit down when weary; and could never think of loitering, to interfere with other men's business, to examine curiosities, or to join in vain diversions. With all speed he must urge his course to the city of refuge; as if he had seen the avenger of blood with a drawn sword close behind, and heard him uttering most dreadful menaces. When he had gained the appointed asylum, he was required to abide there, at a distance from all his connexions, those excepted who chose to follow him; and this restriction continued, till the death of the high-priest set him at liberty from his confinement.

Thus the sinner, perceiving himself exposed to the wrath of God and the curse of his violated law, must "flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope "set before him" in the gospel. Without delay he must diligently use all the means of grace, and separate from the vain pursuits and pleasures of an unbelieving world. He must not give "sleep to "his eyes or slumber to his eye-lids; but flee as a "bird from the snare of the fowler, and as a roe "from the hand of the hunter." He must "work "out his own salvation with fear and trembling," and earnestly apply for an interest in the great atonement; knowing that if death should previ-

ously overtake him, the avenging justice of God would prove the ruin of his immortal soul. And when he hath obtained a good hope of his acceptance, he must still keep close to this refuge; renouncing the society of all those, that refuse to join with him in his new course of life; remembering that “if any man love father, or mother, wife, or children, more than Christ, he cannot be his disciple.”

Thus the true believer is *in Christ*, as in the city of refuge: and if we do not wish to deceive ourselves, we may know whether our experience, conduct, and confidence bear any resemblance to this representation; and whether we desire to join the apostle in saying, “Yea doubtless, I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord:—I count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found *in him*, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law; but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

He, that is thus in Christ is finally delivered from condemnation; all his sins are blotted out and buried in the depths of the sea; “Being justified by faith he hath peace with God;” to whom being reconciled when an enemy “by the death of his Son, he shall be saved by his life.” He is

¹ Phil. iii. 8, 9,

admitted into a covenant of friendship with the everlasting God, and adopted into his family as a son and heir. “All things shall work together “for his good,” and “nothing shall separate him “from the love of Christ.” All the promises without exception belong to him, and shall be fulfilled in due season and order; “for,” says the apostle, “all things are your’s, and ye are Christ’s, “and Christ is God’s.”—We consider, then,

II. The inward change, which every real christian has experienced. “He is a new creature.”

Whether any one were previously a Jew or a gentile; whether he were moral, civil, learned, ingenious, devout, zealous, or superstitious and enthusiastical, a sceptical reasoner, or a scoffing infidel; when he becomes a christian, “he is a new “creature.”—“We are his workmanship, created “in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God “hath before ordained that we should walk in “them.” “For in Christ Jesus neither circum- “cision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, “but a new creature.” What are we then to understand by these energetick expressions?—Will any sensible man maintain, that a new creed or name may properly be called a new creation? Will he affirm that nothing more was meant than a

decent moral conduct, or an external reformation? Does this amount to any thing more than the cleansing of the outside, while the heart remains full of pollution? Such frigid interpretations must be merely the word of man; for “the word of God “ is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-
“ edged sword; piercing even to the dividing
“ asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and
“ marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and
“ intents of the heart¹.”

It is, however, proper to observe, that he, who is a new creature, continues, in many respects, the same as before. His body with all its members and senses is the same; though he finds himself disposed to make a new use of them: his soul and all his faculties are the same, though his judgment and affections are entirely changed. He possesses his former measure of capacity and learning, with the peculiarity of his genius and the original complexion of his mind. The man of enlarged powers does not lose that superiority of talent; while he is content to be thought a fool for Christ's sake, to seek wisdom from him with the teachableness of a little child, and to devote all his endowments to the glory of the Giver. The man of slender abilities and illiterate education, makes no advances in learning or ingenuity, except as he becomes of “good understanding in the way of
“ godliness.” No alteration takes place in any

¹ Jer. xxiii. 29. Heb. iv. 12.

person's relative situation or rank in society: he can claim no additional civil immunities or advancement, when he is "in Christ a new creature:" nor does he forfeit any of his rights; though persecution may deprive him of them, and love of Christ make him willing to renounce them.—In general he abides in his calling, if lawful; but endeavours to fill it up in a new manner.

What then is especially intended?—Here again the scripture assists our enquiry by apt illustrations. "Ye were," says the apostle, "the servants of sin, but ye obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, which was delivered you¹." Learned men generally agree, that the concluding words would be more exactly rendered, *into which ye were delivered*; alluding to the mould into which melted metal is poured, that it may thence take it's intended fashion and impression. When vessels of silver have been thus formed again; they are as really *new*, as if the metal had just been brought from the mine. Thus sinners are in themselves, "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction," bearing the image of fallen Adam, and disposed to imitate his rebellion and apostacy: but the new creation forms them into "vessels of mercy, prepared for glory," stamped with the image of Christ, "fitted for their Master's use, and ready for every

¹ Rom. vi. 17.

“good work.” They are the same men, yet new creatures.

The grafted tree also is in many respects the same as before: yet it is a new tree, and as the poet beautifully expresses it,

Miraturque novas frondes, et non sua poma.

‘It wonders at its new leaves, and fruit that is not its own.’—Thus when the word of truth is engrafted in the heart by the Holy Spirit, the same man becomes a new creature, and his thoughts, words, and actions also become new.

The scriptural emblems of sinners, according to their different propensities, are taken from lions, tigers, foxes, swine, and serpents, and other fierce, crafty, ravenous, or filthy animals: but a sheep or a dove is the emblem of a Christian; and the new creation effects this marvellous change. “The
“wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the
“leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf
“the young lion and the fatling together; and
“a little child shall lead them. And the cow
“and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall
“lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw
“like the ox: and the sucking child shall play
“on the hole of the asp; and the weaned child
“shall put his hand on the cockatrice den: they
“shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy moun-
“tain.” Does not every man perceive, that if

¹ Is. xi. 6—9.

Almighty God should dispose these animals to live together in perfect amity, as here described, they would be *new creatures*; though the same outward form, and many other peculiarities of each species should remain? And who can deny, that if the grace of God so change the ambitious, rapacious, covetous, fraudulent, contentious, revengeful, cruel, sensual, and profane; that they willingly live together, “in all the commandments and “ordinances of the Lord blameless,” they are to all religious purposes new creatures?

Let any considerate and impartial man compare the character and spirit of St. Paul, before and after his conversion; and determine for himself, whether the apostle was not a new creature. His body and soul, his abilities and ardent turn of mind, continued the same; but, in other respects, he differed as much from his former self, as from any other man in the world. The change would probably appear as remarkable, in the case of Matthew, Zaccheus, or Onesimus, had we as copious an account of them, as we have of the apostle. — Nay, the thief upon the cross gave evident proofs, that the tree was made good; for the fruit began to be good, and would doubtless have been abundant had his life been spared.— Even when a man’s outward conduct has been irreproachable, the internal change in his views, purposes, and desires, is clearly manifest to his own mind, though the effects be less visible to others.

The various metaphors, in which this new creation is spoken of in scripture, confirm this explanation. "A new heart, will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you," saith the Lord¹. But reformation, without an inward change of disposition, would be a mere counterfeit of the promised blessing.—"Ye must be born again."—"Blessed be God who hath begotten us again to a lively hope²." The allusion is made, in this common scriptural language, to the production of a creature, which before had no separate existence, but now possesses life, has capacities of action and enjoyment, wants nourishment, and may be expected to grow to maturity: and it is the invariable rule of nature, that the offspring bears the image and inherits the propensities of the parent animal. The emphatical meaning of "being born again," "born of the Spirit," "born of God," must be very manifest: and had our Lord only intended an outward ordinance or reformation, when he said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except ye be born again, ye cannot see the kingdom of God;" it could not have been denied, that he had perplexed a plain subject by a needless obscurity of expression.

"You hath he quickened," saith the apostle, "who were dead in trespasses and sins." Man, as the Lord created him, possessed animal life and its

¹ Ezek. xi. 19, 20. xxxvi. 25—27.

² John, iii. 1—8. 1 Pet. i. 3, 23.

propensities; as a rational creature, he was capable of actions and enjoyments of a higher order; and as *spiritual* he was capable of finding happiness in the love and service of God: but he has lost his *spiritual* life and is *dead in sin*. Fallen angels possess the powers of reason to a very great degree: yet they are *spiritually dead*; they are incapable of loving and enjoying God, and finding happiness in his holy service: and, I am persuaded that sober reflection will convince any candid enquirer, that the most rational man living is, while unregenerate, as incapable of the pleasures angels enjoy in heaven, as animals are of sharing the satisfactions of the philosopher. This appears in one remarkable circumstance: when any person renounces all other pursuits for the sake of religion, it is always supposed that he leads a joyless life, and is in danger of becoming melancholy; as if the felicity of “angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect,” were wholly unsuited to man’s nature on earth, and incapable of affording him delight!

The same internal renovation is called “the circumcision of the heart to love the Lord;” and described under the image of “putting his law in the *heart*, and writing it in the *inward* parts.” “For the grace of God which bringeth salvation, teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.”

This change begins that “renewing in the spirit
 “of our mind,” the “transformation by the renew-
 “ing of our mind” “the putting off the old man,”
 and “the putting on the new man;” for these ex-
 pressions relate to the growth of the new creature,
 and the removal of every thing that retards it. So
 that *regeneration* is the beginning of *sanctification*,
 which signifies the *making of that person or thing*
holy, which was before unholy.

We cannot however, fully explain or even com-
 prehend *the manner*, in which the new nature is
 communicated. In general we may observe, that
 as natural life subsists in every part of the animal;
 so spiritual life pervades all the faculties of the
 soul. It is light, knowledge, and judgment in
 the understanding; sensibility in the conscience;
 purity, spirituality, and fervour in the affections,
 and submission in the will: and this entire inward
 revolution produces proportionable effects upon
 the whole conduct and character of the real
 Christian. But this will appear more distinctly,
 while,

III. We consider the effects of the change,
 “Old things are passed away; behold, all things
 “are become new.”

This language is general, and no exceptions are
 intimated.—He who hath thus “passed from
 “death unto life,” will find that his old sentiments
 and thoughts are vanished. His high opinion of

himself, of his abilities, actions, and heart are no more; he ceases to shine in his own eyes, and gradually discovers that he is "wretched, poor, miserable, blind, and naked;" he is constrained to renounce all dependence on his wisdom and righteousness, to distrust his own heart as "deceitful and desperately wicked," and to abhor himself as a guilty polluted criminal. Nor can he ever again recover those lofty thoughts of himself, which once were natural to him.

His hard thoughts of the divine law, as unreasonably strict and severe, are passed away: and he can no longer entertain his former palliating notions concerning the evil of sin. He perceives the commandment to be holy, just, and good; and the transgression of it to be replete with ingratitude, rebellion, and contempt of God. He dares no longer impeach the divine justice and goodness, in respect of the punishments denounced against sinners: his old thoughts and reasonings on these subjects are gone, and he is astonished at his own presumption, in having formerly indulged them.

His sentiments concerning the happiness to be enjoyed in worldly pleasures, and the gloom and melancholy of a religious life, are wholly changed. He can no longer think of eternity as uncertain or distant: and no temptation or discouragement can henceforth prevail with him, to give up his hope of everlasting life, to rest satisfied with a portion in

this world, or to risk the tremendous consequences. “ He looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

His former thoughts of Christ and his salvation are passed away. He once despised the glorious Redeemer in his heart ; perhaps he deemed those to be hypocrites or enthusiasts, who spoke in animated language of his love and preciousness : but these imaginations are no more ; he is now ready to exclaim, “ How great is his goodness ! how great is his beauty ! ”—He counts all but loss for Christ, and fears exceedingly coming short of his salvation. He cannot think meanly of him, or be indifferent to his favour, cause, or glory ; yet he continues dissatisfied with the degree of his admiring love and gratitude to his great Benefactor.—His former opinions concerning the wise and happy among the sons of men are irrecoverably gone. He pities the very persons, whom he once admired or envied ; and he counts the despised and afflicted disciples of Christ “ the excellent of the earth, in whom is all his delight.” He longs to share their privileges and felicity : nor could he recover his former aversion to them, even if he supposed that he should be for ever excluded from their company.

When any one is in Christ a new creature, his old pursuits and pleasures also pass away.—As the

man of business has done with the pastimes of childhood: so the believer ceases to relish those scenes of dissipated or sensual indulgence, which once were his element. He finds himself uneasy, when they come in his way: not only deeming them a criminal waste of time and money, and a wilful hindrance to serious reflection; but feeling them to be a chasm in his enjoyment, and an interruption to his comfort, in communion with God, and the company of his servants.

His conduct is still more decided in things directly evil; "How shall he that is dead to sin live any longer therein?" He hates and dreads sin as his worst enemy: "His seed remaineth in him, that he cannot sin, because he is born of God." He does not indeed forsake his lawful employments; but he gradually learns to follow them from new motives, and in a new manner; not from covetousness or on worldly principles, but as his duty, from love to God and man, and according to the precepts of the sacred scriptures.

It will readily be perceived, that the old companions of such a man will pass away. Even when relative duties and other causes render some intercourse with ungodly persons unavoidable, it will become less cordial and intimate. When such opposite characters meet, one of them must be out of his element: all those associates therefore of the new convert's former years, who have no interest in continuing the acquaintance, will drop off, as

leaves from the trees in autumn: and he will find that the society of his most agreeable old companions is become irksome; for they seem far more profane and frivolous than they used to be.

Time would fail, should we particularly consider how the new convert's former discourse is passed away: and how his idle, slanderous, profane, or perhaps polluting, words are exchanged for such as are pure, peaceable, and edifying¹. And it is almost needless to state, that his old course of behaviour also is finally renounced. The particulars that have been mentioned, may serve for a specimen: and it should be remembered, that in every respect in which "old things pass away, all things become new," the apostle, by inserting the word *behold*, hath emphatically demanded our attention to this circumstance!

This too might be illustrated, by considering the various operations of the believer's mind, and the objects of his affections. He hopes and fears, grieves and rejoices, desires and hates, in a new manner; and his passions have respect to new objects. He fears the wrath and frown of God; he hopes for glory and immortality; he mourns for his own sins, and the miseries of other men; he rejoices in God, hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and abhors that which is evil. His judgment and taste are gradually formed upon God's

¹ Eph. iv. 29. v. 4. Col. iv. 6. Jam. i. 26. iii.

word; his memory is replenished with divine truths, and his imagination employed in realizing invisible things. The company of his choice, the places of his willing resort, the books he prefers, his select topicks of discourse, the use he makes of his time and talents, the manner in which he conducts business, and enjoys the comforts of life, might be enlarged upon, to shew in what respects "all things are become new." For the real Christian desires, that "whether he eat or drink, or whatsoever he do, he may do all to the glory of God."

The extent of the apostles' meaning may, however, be further illustrated, by shewing that the believer does the same things in a new manner, in respect of the *best part* of his former conduct, and *the worst* of his present.—He used perhaps to attend on religious ordinances: and though his heart was not engaged, nor his professions sincere; he returned home well satisfied with having done his duty, or elated with an idea of his own goodness. But now, when his prayers and praises are the language of his habitual judgment and desires, and he is upon the whole a spiritual worshipper; he is continually humbled for the unallowed defects and evils of his services, and seeks to have all washed in the atoning blood of Christ.

On the other hand, it must be allowed that sin dwelleth even in the true convert; and he may possibly fall into the same evil, in which he once

habitually indulged with little remorse. But in this case he is filled with anguish; he deeply abases himself before God, confesses his guilt, deprecates deserved wrath, submits to sharp correction, craves forgiveness, and “prays to be restored to the joy of God’s salvation, and upheld by his free Spirit.” Even in these respects “all things are become new.”

In short, the proposition is universal: and the true believer, in all things acts from new motives, by a new rule, and to accomplish far other purposes, than he formerly had in view. But the more particular examination of the subject must be left to your private meditations, while we conclude at present with a brief application.

There are persons professing to be Christians, who avowedly disregard this subject; and if we speak of regeneration or the new creature, are ready to answer, “How can these things be?” or perhaps to retort an indiscriminate charge of enthusiasm. But do you intend to answer your Judge in this manner? Do you expect to enter heaven, by disproving the truth of his most solemn and repeated declarations? Is *your* judgment the standard of truth? Can nothing be needful to salvation, which *you* do not experience? If God be indeed glorious in holiness: if the society and joys of heaven be holy, and if man be unholy, an entire change must, in the very nature of things, take place, before he can possibly delight

in God, or enjoy heaven, were there no other obstacle to his salvation. Let me therefore earnestly beseech you to reconsider the subject: let me prevail with you to search the scriptures, and to beg of God to shew you the true meaning of them; and to grant, that if these things be indeed true and needful, you may know them by your own happy experience.

Again, some religious people profess to *know* that their sins are forgiven, and others are anxious to obtain this assurance. If then it be asked, how can any man be thus certain in this matter? I answer, by a consciousness, that “he is in Christ “a new creature, that old things are passed away, “and all things are become new.” When our Lord forgave the sins of the paralytick, he enabled him to carry his bed; this proved his sins forgiven, both to himself and others. And in like manner, when we know that, in consequence of having applied to Christ for salvation, we abhor all sin, love the ways of God, and delight in pious company; we have a witness in ourselves, and the testimony of God in his word, that we partake of the gift of righteousness by faith. The clearer this evidence of our new creation appears, the fuller ground of assurance we possess: we are therefore exhorted, “to give all diligence to make “our calling and election sure:” but, without this, all impressions and supposed revelations, declaring our sins to be pardoned, are manifest

delusions; for they contradict the express testimony of God in his holy word.

Too many profess the gospel, who give no evidence of this gracious change, and stumble others by their unholy lives: but the text at once cuts off such men's pretensions; and the reproach ought to rest on themselves, and not on the holy doctrines which they disgrace.

But, as "the path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day," I would earnestly and affectionately caution the serious enquirer, not to undervalue feeble beginnings; but to take encouragement from them to press forward, in the diligent use of the means of grace; that the change may be rendered more evident, and that he may "abound in hope by the power of the holy Ghost."

Let discouraged souls likewise, who feel sin to be their burden, grief, and terror, and who are ready to say to the Saviour, "Lord, to whom shall I go? thou hast the words of eternal life;" let such fainting, and feeble minded believers, learn to derive encouragement from their very fears, jealousies, sighs, groans, and tears, because "of the sin that dwelleth in them;" and "because they cannot do the things that they would:" for these are, without doubt, effects and evidences of the new creation.

Finally, my brethren, if you can rejoice in the assurance, that you are partakers of these inestimable benefits; shew your gratitude to God, by

endeavouring to communicate the same blessings to your fellow sinners: knowing that his mercy and grace are sufficient for them also; that he makes use of reconciled enemies, as instruments in reconciling others also to himself; and that he preserves them in life especially for this most gracious purpose,

SERMON VII.

PSALM ii. 12

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

WHATEVER were the immediate occasion of this psalm, it evidently contains a most remarkable prophecy concerning Christ, and the divine vengeance to be inflicted on those who opposed the establishment of his kingdom. The Jews were the peculiar objects of the threatened indignation; and they are also the witnesses of the authenticity of those scriptures, in which the prophecy is contained: for by them the old Testament has been preserved; and they now unanimously attest that the psalm before us was written at least a thousand years before Jesus of Nazareth was born.

It may therefore, be useful in the first place to call your attention, to this remarkable prophecy of things already accomplished, or hastening to an

accomplishment.—“Why do the heathen rage,
 “and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings
 “of the earth stand up, and the rulers take coun-
 “sel together, against the Lord, and against his
 “anointed,” Let us hear the apostles’ application
 of this passage: “for of a truth against thy holy
 “child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both
 “Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the gentiles and
 “the people of Israel, were gathered together, to
 “do *whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel deter-*
 “*mined before to be done*.” These concluding
 words are well worthy of our notice: as they illus-
 trate the plan of divine providence in the govern-
 ment of the world. We are apt to wonder that
 wicked men should be permitted to triumph as
 they often do: not considering that the Lord em-
 ploys even rebels to fulfil his righteous purposes;
 and that, contrary to their own intention, they
 are made the executioners of his vengeance, or
 used as his chastening rod. Even athiests and
 infidels, yea, the haughtiest and most self-willed of
 his enemies, are permitted to prosper, till they
 have inflicted condign punishment on sinners,
 perhaps less criminal than themselves, and then
 they are consigned to more tremendous vengeance.
 —Nay, the Lord even makes use of wicked men
 to accomplish his designs of mercy to the church.
 Thus the Jewish rulers and priests, with Herod,

* Acts, iv. 25—28.

Pilate, and the people of Israel, though before at enmity with each other, combined together against the Saviour of the world: they thought evil against him and his church, “but the Lord meant it for “good’.” And they could only do what “his “hand and counsel had determined before to be “done.”

“The kings of the earth stood up, and the “rulers took counsel together against the Lord, “and against his anointed,” or his Messiah; saying, “Let us break his bonds assunder, and cast “away his cords from us.” All the power and policy of man seemed to be leagued together, with a fixed determination to destroy Jesus and extirpate his doctrine. His numerous and formidable enemies unanimously resolved that “they would “not have this man to reign over them.” The priests and rulers excited the people to demand his crucifixion, with unrelenting vehemence. They aimed to blot out the remembrance of him and his spiritual dominion from the earth, that they might have no authority but that of the magistrate. “We have no king but Cæsar, whoso- “ever maketh himself a king, speaketh against “Cæsar.” Observe, my brethren, what was their principal objection to the religion of Jesus, and whence it arose. They hated the law and government of God; and therefore they rebelled against

the kingdom and authority of his Son. Thus men still reject the gospel, because it magnifies and honours the law and justice of God, condemns all their former transgressions, and with the proposal of a gracious pardon, implies an obligation to obedience in future; and in this respect the same part is acted over and over again, from generation to generation.

But mark what follows: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision:" He looks down with contempt and disdain upon their puny attempts to subvert his kingdom and counteract his sovereign purposes.—"Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure." Let us see how this prophecy was fulfilled. The Jews crucified the Lord Jesus for declaring that he was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. But, behold, he demonstrates himself to be that glorious Redeemer! He dies indeed, but he rises from the dead, ascends into heaven, takes possession of his exalted throne, and sends forth his Spirit upon his apostles, that they may be empowered to establish his religion in the world. The Jewish rulers and people, however, having blasphemed his miracles, and condemned him to the cross, persist in their enmity, oppose his ambassadors, and persecute his harmless disciples.—But what is the consequence? The gospel rapidly gains ground; persecution drives believers into remote regions, to

convey the glad tidings to mankind; the dying martyrs, confirming their testimony by their harmless lives and patient sufferings, shew the excellency of their principles, and expose the odious cruelty of their adversaries. At length the day of vengeance arrives: he that sitteth in the heavens had poured contempt upon his impotent foes, and triumphed gloriously, notwithstanding their feeble, though determined opposition; but now “he speaks to them in his wrath, and vexes them in his sore displeasure.” Jerusalem is surrounded by the Roman legions, the executioners of the sentence which had been pronounced: miseries till then unknown are inflicted on the devoted nation; eleven hundred thousand persons perish in the siege; the survivors are sold for slaves, till no more purchasers can be found; the city and temple are entirely destroyed, and the sacred hill of Zion given up, to be henceforth “trodden under foot of the gentiles,” according to another memorable prophecy, which hath now been fulfilling for nearly one thousand eight hundred years¹! An apostate emperor attempts, in defiance of Christ, to rebuild the temple and restore the Jews; but his design is frustrated by earthquakes and the signal interposition of heaven: while the Jews themselves, scattered through all nations, and almost every where oppressed, are reluctant

¹ Luke, xxi. 24.

witnesses to the truth of the scriptures, and monuments of divine vengeance on the despisers of the gospel.

The Roman emperors also exerted their extensive and absolute authority in opposing the establishment of Christianity; and it is remarkable, that several of those, who are celebrated for *virtue*, were the most determined persecutors.—But what was the event? From that time this mighty empire was undermined, and at length Christianity was established, as it were, upon its ruins!

It would not be a difficult task to shew, from the history of succeeding ages, that God hath fulfilled his promise, in maintaining his church against the most virulent rage of her numerous and powerful enemies; according to the next words of this prophecy, “ Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion :” and the event will be the same with all other rulers and nations, who set themselves to oppose the kingdom of Christ.—For a season they may prosper, boast, and blaspheme; and say, with Sennacherib, to the servants of the Lord, “ Let not your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, Ye shall not be delivered into my hands—Behold, ye have heard what I have done unto all lands, and shall ye be delivered?”—But God will answer them, as he did the proud Assyrian, “ I know thy abode, and thy going out and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. “ Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is

“ come up into my ears ; therefore I will put my
 “ hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips ;
 “ and I will turn thee back by the way by which
 “ thou camest.—The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall
 “ do this’ ;” for he hath said, and he will accomplish
 it, “ Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of
 “ Zion.”

But the prophecy still further expands itself :
 “ I will declare the decree : the Lord hath said
 “ unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I be-
 “ gotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee
 “ the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utter-
 “ most parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou
 “ shalt break them with a rod of iron, thou shalt
 “ dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Be
 “ wise now, therefore, O ye kings, be instructed,
 “ ye judges of the earth.” The counsel is address-
 ed to kings, because monarchy was the more ge-
 neral kind of dominion : but all invested with
 authority are evidently meant, by whatever titles
 they may be distinguished. They are the judges
 of the earth, whose judgment is submitted to in all
 the secular concerns of mankind. These dignified
 personages are admonished to be wise, and wel-
 come instruction ; especially in respect of the
 kingdom, which the Lord hath established under
 the government of his only begotten Son.—It

¹ Is. xxxvii. 10, 11, 28—33.

therefore follows, "Serve the Lord with fear, and
"rejoice with trembling."

'Submit to the authority of God; bow your
'sceptres to the sceptre of the Messiah: employ
'your power and influence in obeying his com-
'mands and promoting his glory: presume not,
'in any case, to set your authority in opposition
'to his; lest he dash you in pieces like a potter's
'vessel. Stand in awe of his power, reverence
'his majesty; and, while you rejoice in your ex-
'alted rank, and all its alluring appendages; trem-
'ble also, lest they should occasion your deeper
'condemnation.'—"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry,
"and ye perish from the way: when his wrath is
"kindled, yea, but a little; blessed are all they
"that put their trust in him."

The conclusion of the psalm is very emphatical:
and the turn given to the address may imply far
more than is expressed, with a trivial change in
the punctuation. This is frequently the manner
of the sacred writers. "How shall ye escape, if ye
"neglect so great salvation?" "What is a man
"profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose
"his own soul?"—The psalmist having said,
"When his wrath is kindled, yea, but a little,"
breaks off abruptly, as if he meant to add, 'I
'will not, I cannot describe the misery of that
'man, against whom the wrath of Christ is kindled
'in the least degree: I leave the subject as too

‘dreadful to be insisted on; and will rather direct your thoughts to a more delightful consideration;’ “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

Having thus briefly reviewed this prophecy, I will again demand your attention to its contents, which are too obvious to need much interpretation, and which involve no ambiguity or uncertainty. Have not these predictions, concerning the opposition of the world to the kingdom of Christ, and his triumph over his enemies, been exactly fulfilled? Have not facts corresponded with the evident meaning of the language here used?

These accomplishments of scripture, in things which no human sagacity could possibly foresee, are unequivocal demonstrations that it is the word of the omniscient God. Ingenious men may easily start plausible objections, or answer arguments with sarcasm, or repartee: but is this a suitable way of treating subjects of such awful importance? Let the opposers of our holy religion stand forth with manly frankness, and fairly prove, if they can, that these prophecies were not delivered a thousand years before the coming of Christ; or else that the events have not corresponded to them. Until one of these things has been undeniably effected; we shall continue to affirm, that so far from believing without evidence, we have unspeakably better reasons to assign for our faith and hope, than unbelievers can have for any of their opinions.

For my own part, after a diligent examination of the subject, during many years, I am fully convinced that the Bible is the infallible word of God; and am thankful, that I did not imbibe this sentiment from education or early prejudices, but that it has been the result of a most hesitating investigation: because this gives me a confidence, not easily to be shaken, that the gospel will maintain its ground, though all the genius, learning, eloquence, and authority of the whole world should unite against it. Nay, I am assured, that it will survive the ruin of all its enemies, who can only destroy themselves: for they can neither prevent its progress and triumphs, nor hinder the salvation of the meanest believer; but will, at length, find, that “it is hard to kick against the pricks.”—The remainder of the present discourse will contain a more particular consideration of the text, in the following method.

I. We will enquire into the special nature of that kingdom, which God hath determined to establish;

II. Notice the exhortation of the text; “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry.”

III. Make some remarks on the warning and encouragement, “If his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little; blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

I. Then, we consider the special nature of the Messiah's kingdom. "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." This was the purpose of God, even when he created the world. He formed the earth to be a theatre, on which he might display his essential glory: and the person, salvation, and kingdom of Emmanuel, constitute the grandest exhibition of all the mysteries and perfections of the divine nature that hath ever been made. All the dispensations of providence have been arranged, in subserviency to the same great design; as it must be evident to all who carefully study the history of the Old Testament, or indeed the history of the world in every age.

When therefore the tempter had prevailed on our first parents to violate the Creator's prohibition, the promise of a Saviour was immediately given: "The Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head:" "The Messiah shall overturn the usurped dominion of the devil, and set up his kingdom on the ruins of it; to the final confusion and destruction of that great ringleader in rebellion against God."—The Messiah, as the Head of this kingdom, was foretold in the law of Moses, and by the prophets, who "spake of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." This was the Stone seen in vision by Nebuchadnezzar; which was "cut out of the mountain without

* 1 Pet. i. 10—12.

“hands,” and having destroyed all opposition, “became a great mountain, and filled the whole “earth.””

3 In the fulness of time the promised Saviour appears: and his messenger goes before him, proclaiming as a herald, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”—Now the ancient prophecies are fulfilled; “The blind receive their “sight, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised.” “Behold a voice from heaven, saying, This is “my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; “hear ye him.” He leads a lowly and suffering life: he goes about doing good: his most beneficent doctrine is confirmed by benign miracles of the most stupendous nature: all his words and works are stamped with divine wisdom, holiness, love, and power. Yet is he “despised and re- “jected of men.” He dies a spotless sacrifice upon the cross; numbered with malefactors, and treated with extreme contempt, malice, and cruelty. He rises from the dead a glorious Conqueror, “as- “cends up on high, leading captivity captive, and “receiving gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious “also, that the Lord God may dwell among “them.” Now “he receives to himself a king- “dom,” “All power in heaven and earth is given “to him:” “angels, principalities, and powers, “are made subject to him; and he is made Head

¹ Dan. ii. 31—48.

² Ps. lxxviii. 18.

“over all things to his church!” His apostles having received the promise of the Spirit from on high, go forth every where preaching the gospel, and declaring that “the same Jesus,” whom the Jews had crucified, “is exalted to be a prince and a Saviour; to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins:” “That there is no salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given unto men, whereby we must be saved;” while the miraculous powers which they display and communicate, confirm their testimony and command attention. Their formidable persecutors are confounded, thousands and tens of thousands embrace the religion of the crucified Jesus; till Jewish infidelity, and pagan idolatry, and all the power and policy with which they are supported, fall down before it; as the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision before the Stone cut out of the mountain without hands.

In this manner JEHOVAH attested the despised Jesus to be his well-beloved Son; thus, as it were, addressing the Jews, ‘Ye have crucified the Lord of Glory, because he said I am the Son of God; but behold I have raised him from the dead! I have exalted him at my right hand in heavenly places,’ “I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion,” ‘according to my ancient predictions. Now the whole earth shall be his inheritance, whatever obstacles or enemies may oppose him. I have undertaken and I will accomplish it: all men shall

either bow to the sceptre of his grace, and become his willing subjects and redeemed people; or they shall be crushed as obstinate rebels under his feet. This is the determination of the Lord of Hosts.'

A mistaken idea of Christianity seems in this respect to be very prevalent. Numbers imagine, that it may be very well to believe the gospel, but that there is no *necessity* of so doing; as others may be safe and happy upon their own plans. But the scripture uses a very different language: Christianity is there considered as the only true religion, and faith in Christ the only way of being saved. This is no unessential matter, in which men may safely embrace opposite opinions: every man who reverences the Bible as the word of God, must own, that no unbeliever can escape final condemnation: for the Lord himself hath repeatedly attested it; and "he that believeth not, hath made him a liar." Let it also be observed, that even the adorable Saviour himself, the great object of our faith, is constituted our Judge: and it is never intimated, that in the decisive hour, he will make any exception in favour of the mighty monarch, the renowned warrior, the busy politician or tradesman, the learned sceptick, or the indolent and inconsiderate trifler. "He that believeth not shall be damned." One distinction will then swallow up all others: the faithful disciple will sit down with him upon his throne; and all unbe-

lievers will be “punished with an everlasting destruction from his presence.”

The kingdom of Christ is administered by him in the character of a Mediator. As soon as sin entered into the world, the Lord made known his purpose of dealing with men, through the intervention of a Peace-maker; in whose person as Emmanuel, and through whose obedience unto the death of the cross, he might honourably shew mercy to the transgressors of his holy law. So that they who oppose his kingdom, not only rebel against the authority of God, but despise the riches of his everlasting mercy. To effect our reconciliation to our offended Creator, the eternal Son of God was made partaker of flesh and blood; and having “suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, “that he might bring us to God;” he is now ascended into the heavens, as our merciful and faithful High-priest and Advocate. “The government is upon his shoulders,” that he might be “able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God through him.” Angels, principalities, and powers obey and adore him. “He has “the keys of death and hell;” He is “King of “kings, and Lord of lords.” The kingdom of nature and providence is administered by him as our Brother and Friend: “All judgment is committed to him;” “all the fulness of the God-head dwells in him bodily.” He is the Head of

all things to his church, “the fulness of him that
“ filleth all in all.”

How astonishing is this language! how stupendous his grace; who, from this height of personal and mediatorial dignity and pre-eminence, looks down in compassion on us sinful worms, and seems only to glory in his power, as it enables him to enrich and bless our guilty souls! He reigns upon a mercy-seat, dispensing pardons and gifts to rebellious men; pardons and gifts, which he purchased for them with his own blood! He proclaims his immeasurable love in the blessed gospel; he sends his Holy Spirit to glorify him in our hearts, receiving of those things which belong to him, and shewing them to us, in all their suitableness and inestimable value. He invites all that will, to come and take of these blessings freely; he casts out none that come; and he confers all things pertaining to life and godliness on every waiting soul. With the highest propriety therefore, angels celebrated the Redeemer’s birth in that expressive song of praise, “Glory to God in the highest, “ and on earth peace, good will towards men;” for “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through “ him might be saved.” Yet, if men “refuse him “ that speaketh;” if they “despise his counsel, and “ will none of his reproof:” he will most certainly glorify his power in their destruction. “God

“hath given him a name which is above every
 “name; that at the name of Jesus every knee
 “should bow;—and that every tongue should con-
 “fess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of
 “God the Father.” This agrees with the solemn
 declaration quoted by the apostle, “As I live,
 “saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and
 “every tongue shall confess to God¹.”

Let it be likewise observed, that “the yoke of
 “Christ is easy, and his burden light.” Not only
 are all his subjects made heirs of heaven; they
 have “also the promise of the life that now is;”
 the full assurance that no good thing shall be
 withholden from them, and they shall receive an
 hundred-fold, even in this present time, for all
 the losses they sustain from love to Christ and the
 gospel.

II. Then let us notice the exhortation of the
 text: “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and so ye
 “perish from the way:” that is, ‘Submit and be
 reconciled to him, before the day of vengeance
 overtake you.’

This implies in the first place, submission to
 the righteousness of God, and a humble acceptance
 of mercy in his appointed way. We cannot come
 to a Saviour, except in the character of lost sinners.

¹ Is. xlv. 21—25. Rom. xiv. 11. Phil. ii. 10, 11.

We are therefore required to humble ourselves before God, and to allow the justice of his awful sentence: and we must not at all excuse our crimes, or expect deliverance from wrath, and the gift of eternal life, as in any degree our due. "Wilt thou," says JEHOVAH, "condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous¹?" This was precisely the case of the ancient Jews; "they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth²."

There are two principal reasons of men's rejecting the gospel. In general they hate religion, and desire to live without restraint. They take pleasure in worldly objects: and if not compelled by their circumstances to labour, or engaged in covetous or ambitious pursuits; they love to spend their time and money in gratifying their own humour and inclinations: but submission to Christ is absolutely contrary to such a course of life. When, however, this seems to be in a measure got over; and men take a nearer view of Christianity; they are greatly offended at its humiliating doctrines. To come before God as dependent creatures, might be endured: but to approach him as justly condemned criminals is an intolerable degradation;

¹ Job xl. 8.

² Rom. x. 3, 4.

especially when connected with self-denial and renunciation of their darling pursuits. A method of salvation, which paid more respect to their wisdom, learning, or other distinctions, and especially to their *virtue and goodness of heart*, would meet with a better reception. To speculate and decide as philosophers, to perform duties by their native energies and good dispositions, and to demand a reward of their distinguished piety and charity, would better suit their feelings; than to be saved by grace alone, to sit as little children at the feet of Jesus, to give the Lord the glory of every good desire, thought, word, and action; to rely on the all-sufficient merits and atoning blood of the Saviour, and to receive eternal life as the gift of God in him. Yet the general tenour of Scripture requires this unreserved submission of sinners to divine justice, and reliance on free mercy and grace, as essential to salvation.

But the language under consideration, likewise demands implicit obedience to the Saviour, as the anointed King over his redeemed people, and over all worlds for their advantage. "Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the way." When Samuel anointed Saul king over Israel, he testified his cheerful and cordial acquiescence in the Lord's appointment, by the kiss of allegiance. In like manner, we are not only required to welcome the salvation of Christ with unfeigned gratitude, and to express our love by obedience in

some particulars, according to our own choice or discretion: but we are called upon to submit to his authority, and yield obedience in all things; and if our repentance, faith, and love be sincere, we shall cordially render it. Our past sins will appear to us, as acts of rebellion against our Sovereign and bounteous Creator; present failures will be considered as additional provocations, which need forgiveness through the atoning blood; and our obedience, the only undeniable evidence of our repentance and conversion. We shall regard every interest or object which would draw us aside, as an idol and usurper; every contrary propensity as the remains of our old bondage; and the path of duty as true liberty, the perfection of which we shall long after with groans and tears.

But further, we are required, to “honour the Son, even as we honour the Father that sent him¹.” Thus the worshippers of Baal *kissed* his image, and the idolatrous votaries of the golden calves used the same ceremony².” JEHOVAH therefore seems to say in the words of the text, ‘I demand for my beloved Son that very adoration, which I prohibited and abhorred, when offered unto idols.’ When our Lord had said, “I and my Father are One,” the Jews accused him of making himself equal with God; and their renewed attempt to stone him, together with the immediate

¹ John, v. 23.

² 1 Kings, xix. 18. Hos. xiii. 2.

cause of his condemnation to the cross, proves that he neither denied nor evaded the charge. On this point, he and the Jews were at issue; for this supposed crime he suffered and died; but “he was declared to be the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead.” And he, who carefully examines the account given of the worship rendered to “the Lamb that was slain,” by redeemed sinners, an innumerable multitude of angels and all creatures, as made known in vision to the apostle John, will not be able to mark any difference between it, and the adoration paid to ‘Him who sitteth on the throne, and liveth for ever and ever.’ It cannot therefore be wonderful, if the disciples of Christ on earth should be required to learn the worship of heaven, as a part of their “meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.”—But we proceed to,

III. Make some remarks, on the warning and encouragement, “If his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little; blessed are all they that put their trust in him,”

What is this but a declaration, that ‘If you refuse the salvation of Christ, reject his authority, and deny him the honour due to him, his love will be turned into fiery indignation, and he will glorify

his name in taking vengeance on his despisers, as well as in saving and blessing his humble disciples?'—With allusion to the day of judgment, it is said, "The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains: and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" Observe the words, "*the wrath of the Lamb*," the wrath, not only of an offended King and Judge, but also of a despised Saviour. This will enhance the guilt and condemnation of those who neglect the gospel, and render their condemnation more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Our attention should be peculiarly fixed on the expression, "If his wrath be kindled, *yea, but a little*,"—that is, 'Should you be found among the more plausible and moderate of those, who refuse submission to the Saviour; among those who have least provoked his indignation; your doom will yet be very tremendous.'—This comes home to the case of multitudes. Many persons readily express their abhorrence of the blasphemies, atheism, and other enormous crimes, which alas, have

¹ Rev. vi. 15—17.

been perpetrated in a neighbouring nation; and with a latent self-flattery, they rise in their own good opinion, by comparing their conduct, with that of such daring enemies to God and his Christ. Others exclaim against those that deny our Lord's divinity, or his atonement; and they seem to feel much inward satisfaction in opposing these dangerous heresies: while some congratulate themselves, that they never scoff at religion, but always speak respectfully of its sacred truths and duties. Thus in various ways, men keep up a persuasion that they are Christians: yet if we insist upon unreserved submission to Christ, according to that view of it which hath been stated, they would perhaps acknowledge, they had not gone *so far* in religion. If they have not been avowed opponents, they have in great measure endeavoured to maintain a neutrality: but such persons should recollect that Christ hath said, "He that is not with me "is against me;" so that all will be considered enemies, who are not his cordial friends and loyal subjects.—Indeed this is a general cause of men's destruction: they compare themselves with some other characters, fancy themselves better than they, quiet their consciences, and go on in the ways of sin and ungodliness.

But what consolation will it be in the day of wrath, should your condemnation be one degree less heavy, than that of your neighbours? Should you approach as near to christianity, as a man can

possibly do, who is not a true disciple of Christ, what would it avail you? Suppose you hesitate, from love to some lawful earthly comfort, which you prefer to Christ, and refuse to part with for his sake: will not that very circumstance render your feelings most exquisitely poignant, when the doom shall be pronounced against you? This cannot be too closely brought home to conscience; for it was a prevailing delusion, even at the time, when our Lord was on earth. Know therefore, whether thou art a Judas, betraying Christ for sordid lucre, under the mask of a disciple or a minister; a Pilate, "washing thine hands," by giving up his cause from fear of man, and then pretending to excuse it; a Herod, that openly insultest him; a Gallio, that carest for none of these things; or a Felix, who tremblest and stiflest thy convictions: Whether thou join the multitude that cry, "Crucify him, crucify him; not this man, but Barabbas;" or with Agrippa, art "almost persuaded to be a Christian;" or "departest sorrowful, because thou hast great possessions:" "which of these characters soever belongs to thee; know assuredly, that thou wilt perish from the right way, unless thou repent, and become a believing and obedient subject of the Lord Jesus. And what will it avail thee, that numbers will be associated in the same condemnation, or even perish in a still more tremendous manner?

But is not this harsh and uncharitable? Hear the words of Christ himself.—“Except a man deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple.” “Except he forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” Does charity consist in contradicting “the true and faithful Witness,” yea, the all-merciful Saviour, or “in speaking peace, when there is no peace?” The case is the same as it was of old.—Some daringly blaspheme and openly reject the Son of God: others use respectful language; but their actions shew, that they value the pleasures of sin, the friendship of the world, the pride of life, filthy lucre, or the praise of men, more than him and his salvation. But all such persons virtually declare, that they who, actuated by various worldly motives, concurred in nailing him to the cross, did right. None, who lived at that time, and might have heard his doctrine or witnessed his miracles, were wholly free from the guilt of his death, except the remnant of his true disciples: and none at present are wholly free from the charge of “crucifying the Son of God afresh,” who persist in neglecting his great salvation.

“Blessed then are all they that put their trust in him.” They are blessed in their present security and privileges; and they shall be blessed in their eternal inheritance. To you my brethren, who thus cordially welcome the Saviour, and

submit to the king of Zion, with unreserved obedience and fidelity, though with many lamented imperfections; to you belong peace with God, peace of conscience, the adoption of children, and the consolations of the Holy Spirit. It is your privilege to “rejoice in hope, to be patient in tribulations;” to find support in trials, safety in all dangers, victory over every enemy, and a rich advantage from all losses and sufferings. Whether you be rich and prosperous, or poor and afflicted; whatever be your station or circumstances, you are blessed; for God himself hath pronounced you so: you shall be blessed through life and in death, and when the Redeemer shall appear to judge the world. “Lift up then your heads, for your redemption draweth near:” and when others shall cry to the rocks to fall on them, and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb; you shall exclaim with triumphant exultation; “This is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord;—we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

SERMON VIII.

I CORINTHIANS, iv. 5.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.

THE manner in which the zealous, unwearied, and disinterested labours of the apostle Paul were required from mankind, forms the most conclusive proof of human depravity; next to that arising from the contradiction, contempt, and cruelty, which his divine Master had experienced. Not only was this distinguished servant of God “every where spoken against;” and treated as “the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things,” by unconverted Jews and gentiles: the whole body of Jewish converts also were exceedingly prejudiced against him; many of the churches he had planted were alienated from him; and his Corinthian converts had been so perverted by false

teachers, as to entertain the most injurious suspicions, as to the motives of his ministerial conduct. But fervent zeal for the honour of Christ, and affectionate longing after the salvation of souls, kept him from fainting, and rendered him “stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord:” and he even submitted, with the most evident reluctance, to vindicate his character, and magnify his ministry, to the disaffected Corinthians; that, by re-establishing his apostolical authority, he might recover them from the delusions into which they had been seduced. In attempting this, he warned them against exalting some and despising others, of those who had laboured among them. “Let a man,” says he, “so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” All Christians are servants of Christ, and the word rendered *ministers* denotes those servants, who wait on any person, as ready at all times to execute his orders with unreserved assiduity.—But ministers are also stewards of the *mysteries* of God: they are not mere teachers of morality, but they are entrusted with the great mysteries of revealed truth, that they may declare them to mankind, as they have received them of the Lord. “Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.” It is not necessary for ministers to be orators, courtiers, philosophers, or even men of distinguished genius or learning; but integrity and

faithfulness are indispensable. Any person of common prudence would prefer a down-right honest steward, though but moderately qualified, to the most accomplished man in the world, who, he was aware, would oppress his tenants and embezzle his property. Thus faithfulness is the grand requisite in a minister; without which, talents, however they may recommend him to the applause of men, will not procure him deliverance from the wrath of God. "But," says the apostle, "with me it is a very small thing, that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self: for I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord."—It must not be expected, that every one who aims to be faithful, should thus decidedly rise superior to the opinion of men, especially those within the pale of the church. At the call of duty, a minister may be enabled to venture giving offence; yet do it reluctantly and be drawn into many reserves, under the notion of prudence, which may greatly impede his usefulness. Christians should therefore take heed, that they do not inadvertently tempt ministers to unfaithfulness, or render faithfulness uneasy to them. The apostle no doubt did examine his own motives and conduct; but he knew that an appeal lay from his decision to that of his heart-searching Judge; and that reflection gave rise to the caution and warning of the text;

“ Therefore judge nothing before the time, until
 “ the Lord come, who both will bring to light the
 “ hidden things of darkness, and will make mani-
 “ fest the counsels of the hearts, and then shall
 “ every man have praise of God.” Let us

I. Meditate on the coming of the Lord,
 and the solemnities of that awful event.

II. Consider the discoveries which will then
 be made,

III. Advert to the consequences of those
 discoveries.

I. Let us contemplate the coming of the Lord,
 and the solemnities of that awful event.

The sacred scriptures continually lead our
 thoughts to this great crisis, when the important
 and eternal interests of the whole human species
 will be finally determined. The servants of God
 from the beginning of the world looked forward to
 it: even “ Enoch the seventh from Adam pro-
 “ phesied of these things; saying, Behold the
 “ Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to
 “ execute judgment upon all, and to convince all
 “ that are ungodly among them, of all their un-
 “ godly deeds, which they have committed, and of
 “ all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have

“spoken against him.¹” That profession, which Job ardently wished might be “graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever,” seems to have had as much respect to the second coming of the Lord, as to his first appearance in our nature; “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.²”

In the fiftieth psalm, which is a most poetical as well as a prophetic description of a future judgment: we have this sublime language, “Our God shall come and shall not keep silence, a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth that he may judge his people,—And the heavens shall declare his righteousness, *for God is Judge himself.* Selah.³ The words of Solomon shall close these citations from the old Testament. “Rejoice, O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the way of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will call thee into judgment.”—“For God shall bring every work into judgment, with

¹ Jude xiv, 1.

² Job xix, 23, 27.

³ Psalm l. 3—6.

“ every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether
“ it be evil.¹”

In the new Testament the same subject continually demands our attention. Christians are said “ to wait for the Lord from heaven, even Jesus “ who delivered us from the wrath to come,” to “ look for the glorious appearing of the great God “ and our Saviour Jesus Christ,” and “ to love “ his appearing.” Thus the language of the old Testament relative to the coming of JEHOVAH, and our preparing to meet God, who is Judge himself, is applied to Christ by his apostles, without the least hesitation. And with a conscious dignity, he spake of himself, in his lowest abasement, as the Judge of the world, and the arbiter of men’s eternal state, “ When the Son of man “ shall come in his glory, and all his holy angels “ with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of “ his glory, and before him shall be gathered all “ nations.²”

The coming of the Lord signifies therefore, the appearance of Christ in human nature to judge the world ; when he shall exercise omnipotence, omniscience, and every divine perfection ; and so “ come in his own glory” as Mediator, “ and in “ the glory of the Father,” as sovereign Lord of all. This revelation of Jesus Christ will be visible to the whole world. “ This same Jesus, which is

¹ Eccles. xi. 9. xii. 14. ² Matt. xxv. 31, 32.

“ taken up from you into heaven, shall so come
“ in like manner, as ye have seen him go into
“ heaven.” “ Behold, he cometh with clouds,
“ and every eye shall see him, and they that have
“ pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall
“ wail because of him: even so, Amen.’” The
man Jesus, in his glorified body, even that body
which was crowned with thorns, scourged, spitted
on, and nailed to the cross, will then be made
visible to all men, to those who thus abused him,
and to such as have in every age consented to this
deed, by despising him and his salvation. He will
be seen by all “ who have crucified him,” as it
were, again and again; as well as by them, for
whom “ he once suffered, the just for the unjust,
“ to bring them unto God.”

But how immensely will his appearance, as Judge
of the world, differ from that of the man of sor-
rows!—The mount of transfiguration, when “ his
“ countenance shone as the sun, and his raiment
“ was like lightning;” yea, the vision of his glory,
which caused his beloved disciple, who had once
reclined on his bosom, in the familiarity of endear-
ed friendship, to “ fall down at his feet as dead;”
can give us but a faint idea of that divine light
and majesty, with which he will be arrayed, when
he shall ascend his awful tribunal. “ He shall
“ then be revealed from heaven with his mighty

^a Acts, i. 11. Rev. i. 7.

“angels:” *the angels of his power* and authority; the ministers of his vengeance and his love,—“At the end of the world, the Son of man shall send forth his angels; and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” “They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he shall send his angels,—and they shall gather together his elect.”—Hence it is evident that all the angels are the creatures and servants, as well as the worshippers, of the incarnate Son of God.

His coming will be announced by a summons, august and tremendous beyond description; and immediately followed by the resurrection of the dead. “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.” “Behold I shew you a mystery! We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”—“The hour cometh, when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they

¹ Matt. xiii. 41—43. xxiv. 30, 31.

“ that have done good to the resurrection of life,
 “ and they that have done evil to the resurrection
 “ of damnation.”¹ Believers will rise first, and
 then such of the saints as shall be alive on the earth
 at that time, will be changed; that “ death may
 “ be swallowed up in victory.” Afterwards the
 multitudes of the wicked will “ awake to shame
 “ and everlasting contempt.”—The bodies of the
 unnumbered millions, who through succeeding ages
 have inhabited the globe, wherever laid, or however
 consumed, will be restored to life, and reunited
 to their immortal souls, that they may participate
 their happiness or misery. “ Then the dead, small
 “ and great, shall stand before God. The sea shall
 “ give up the dead that were in it; and death and
 “ hell shall deliver up the dead which were in
 “ them.”²

At this important crisis, the earth and all its
 works, yea, the visible heavens also, shall become
 one general conflagration: “ The heavens and
 “ earth, which now are, by the same word are kept in
 “ store, reserved unto fire, against the day of judg-
 “ ment and perdition of ungodly men.” “ The
 “ day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,
 “ in which the heavens shall pass away with a great
 “ noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent
 “ heat; the earth also, and all the works which are

¹ 1 Thess. iv. 16. 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52. John, v. 28, 29.

² Rev. xx. 13—15.

“therein shall be burned up.” Yea, “heaven and earth shall flee away, and there shall be found no place for them.”

In vain should we attempt a description of this sublime and awful scene: our faculties labour, and our tongues as it were falter, when we would think or speak of such subjects.—What then will be the feelings of the immense multitudes assembled on this occasion! What the astonishment, terror, and despair of the impenitent! of such as have idolized those things, which are the prey of all-devouring flames! of those who have blasphemed that Saviour, who appears to be their Judge! or ridiculed the divine testimony concerning the place of torment, and those evil spirits which are ready to seize upon them! Let us then recollect, that *we* shall be present, not as mere spectators, but as cited “to give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.” “For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”² Our present conduct is voluntary; we choose whether we will serve the Lord, or no: but we shall not be allowed to choose, whether we will stand before his tribunal, or decline the awful decision.

It is extremely frivolous to start objections against the doctrines of revelation, taken from our

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 7, 10—12. ² 2 Cor. v. 10.

low apprehensions, or levelled against the misinterpretations of injudicious believers. "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God." He hath declared these things in his authenticated word: "his testimony is sure and giveth wisdom unto the simple:" and "he that believed not hath made him a liar."

Will any man presume to say, that it is impossible for God to raise the dead? That human nature should be capable of such daring absurdity, ought to cover us with shame, and cause us to tremble.—Let us, my friends, imitate the old patriarch, who "by faith, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, was moved with fear and prepared an ark." Let us "prepare to meet our God, and seriously enquire, Who may abide the day of his coming? Or who may stand when he appeareth?"

Neither ought we to regard those "scoffers," who, according to the prediction of the apostle, are "come in these last days, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." We know not indeed the precise time when the Lord shall come; but we should not be ignorant that, "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day:" and we are assured that "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night; for when

“ they shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.”¹ Death is very near, and judgment follows. In this sense “The Judge standeth at the door:” and “the end of all things is at hand.” “Be ye therefore ready; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.” The intervening space will soon elapse: let us then, “account his long suffering to be salvation:” and “seeing we look for such things, let us be diligent, that we may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless.”—We proceed therefore,

II. To consider the discoveries which will then be made.—“The Lord shall come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.”

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory and all his holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats;” that is, with perfect ease, and infallible certainty. Then shall he be seated on “the great white throne,” the emblem of his awful justice and spotless purity, “and the

¹ 1 Thess. v. 2, 3.

“books shall be opened.” This expression, referring to the affairs of men, leads our thoughts to the discoveries of that solemn season. *The book of the divine law* shall be opened, as the perfect standard of good and evil; *the book of Providence*, stating the talents committed to the stewardship of each individual, with the advantages or disadvantages of his situation; *the book of omniscience*, developing all the particulars of every man’s conduct, and all the motives and thoughts of his heart; and the *book of conscience* or memory, answering to every charge or discovery, however before buried in oblivion. But *another book* shall also be opened, or no flesh could be saved; even *the book of life*, in which all the elect of God, all true believers, are registered, with the evidences of their repentance, faith, and love. Then, all “men will be judged out of those things, which are written in the books, according to their works. And whosoever shall not be found written in the book of life, shall be cast into the lake of fire.”¹

We know but little of the real characters even of those with whom we are most intimately acquainted; and far less of other men’s. A vast proportion of their outward conduct is concealed from us: what strangers then must we be to the dispositions and counsels of their hearts! Perhaps a tenth part of the actions of our nearest relatives or

¹ Rev. xx. 12—15.

friends, do not come under our notice: we must therefore judge, as well as we can; and though caution be necessary, a measure of suspicion adequate to our uncertainty, would mar all our earthly enjoyments. David seems not to have suspected Ahithopel, nor the apostles Judas: yet they were both plausible hypocrites. Many of you, my friends, may perhaps be conscious, that if your neighbours, or relations, knew certain things in your conduct, which you carefully and successfully conceal; your characters would be injured, and yourselves covered with confusion. "But when the Lord shall come, he will bring to light all these hidden things of darkness." Then the dishonesty and extortion which have here escaped detection, and even suspicion; or which have been pleaded for with specious fallacy, will appear in all their full deformity before men and angels. The oppression, rapine, and cruelty, which have been gilded over with the splendour of great talents and renowned achievements, will be viewed in another light, when "the earth shall disclose her blood, and no more cover her slain." Nor will that degrading licentiousness and sensuality, which are often covertly practised by persons of decent or respectable character, any longer be concealed; though it is now a shame "to speak of those things which are done of them in secret."

But to relieve our minds from such painful reflexions, let us take a view of the contrast, The

Lord will also bring to light the good works of his believing people: "he saw them in secret, and he "will reward them openly." Those fruits of faith and love, which the world perhaps vilified and called by some opprobrious name; and those, in which they scarcely "let the left hand know what the right hand did," will then be disclosed and approved by the righteous Judge. The self-denial of his despised disciples, in sparing from every article of expence and indulgence, to raise a little fund for the relief of the needy, and even of their calumniators and persecutors; their secret prayers and compassionate tears over the very persons, who counted them harsh and uncharitable, because they would not "speak peace when there was no "peace¹;" their scrupulous care to avoid every degree of injustice, when no blame was likely to be cast upon them for it; their earnestness in secret devotion, with deep humiliation and enlarged benevolence: all these will be discovered when the Lord shall come, and will greatly tend to illustrate and distinguish the characters of men. The blemishes and misconduct of pious persons are too often visible to their neighbours, and give occasion to their scoffs and impiety: but it will then appear, that these things were lamented before God with many groans and tears; that they condemned themselves more severely than others could con-

¹ Jer. viii. 11.

denn them; that they prayed without ceasing not to be left to repeat their sin and folly; and that they vigilantly used every means, of crucifying their evil propensities, and bridling their appetites and passions.

The discoveries of that solemn day will likewise relate to men's words. "Every idle word that men shall speak, shall be given an account of at the day of judgment: for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.¹" Our words must indeed be known in some measure to others: but men are commonly very careful to whom they declare their unreserved sentiments; and would often be extremely disconcerted, if their discourse in private circles, among the select companions of their vices, should be disclosed to those with whom they desire to maintain another kind of character. But the profane, blasphemous, atheistical, infidel, and abominable speeches, which men vent in their secret cabals; with all the falsehoods, slanders, boastings, bitterness, imprecations, and horrid language, which on some occasions they utter, during the whole course of their lives, will be produced against them before the assembled world. "For the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison; it sets on fire the whole course of nature, and is set on fire of hell²." The secret in-

¹ Matt. xii. 36, 37.

² Jam. iii. 6—10.

fluence of evil conversation, corrupts men's principles and morals, and wounds their reputations: it ruins domestick and relative comfort, and disseminates impiety, infidelity, heresy, profligacy, enmity, discord, and confusion, through neighbourhoods, cities, and nations. Yet no discovery can be made of such private mischiefs, except by the omnipresent and omniscient Judge. It would be tedious to insist particularly on the flatteries, deceptions, false colourings, seductions, and other artifices, by which wicked men carry on their base designs. These, however, are hidden things of darkness, which will be brought to light when the Lord shall come. If then all our words, without exception, whether spoken openly, or among our select companions, shall be thus made known at the great decisive day; could nothing else be produced against us, we must surely feel that this alone would overwhelm us with confusion. The story is well known, of the person, who invited a company of his friends, that were accustomed to take the Lord's name in vain; and contrived to have all their discourse taken down and read to them. Now if *they* could not endure to hear the words repeated, which they had spoken during a few hours; how shall we bear to have *all* that we have uttered, through a long course of years, brought forth as evidence against us at the tribunal of God?—But the hour is coming when this will actually be the case: when not a single

irreverent mention of the Creator's sacred name ; not one objection to his law, government, or gospel ; not one sarcasm or jest upon his cause or worshippers, shall be overlooked ! when every word " spoken in the ear in closets, shall be " proclaimed on the house tops ! " Where then will the wicked and ungodly appear ? How shall any of us endure that scrutiny : unless we have fled for refuge to the hope of the gospel, and all our sins have been buried in the depths of the sea ?

But words of another kind shall be made known when the Lord shall come. The servants of God love to associate together, and many censure them for it : but what saith the scripture ? " They that " feared the Lord, spake often one to another ; " and the Lord hearkened and heard it : and a " book of remembrance was written before him, " for them that feared the Lord, and thought " upon his name ; and they shall be mine, saith " the Lord of hosts, in that day, when I make " up my jewels ; and I will spare them as a man " spareth his own son that serveth him. Then " shall ye return, and discern between the righ- " teous and the wicked ; between him that serveth " God, and him that serveth him not ¹." When the " books shall be opened ; " the social piety, gratitude, and charity of true Christians will be

¹ Mal. iii. 16—18.

brought to light. Their discourse about the perfections, ways, and works of God; the best methods of promoting his glory, the peace of the church, and the benefit of mankind: their mutual warnings, exhortations, counsels, and encouragements; their spiritual, affectionate, and animating conversation; and all the words which the Lord delighted to hear, will be made known before men and angels. And when these shall be contrasted with the filthy, impious, and frivolous speeches of the wicked; it may easily be conceived, how men's real characters will be discriminated, and in what sense, "by their words they will be justified or condemned."

The thoughts also of every heart shall be disclosed. Men generally imagine, that these at least are free and subject to no controul; so that they allow their memory and imagination, to excite and feed corrupt affections; representing to themselves, with all the ingenuity of invention, scenes that accord to their predominant propensities: and by these speculative indulgences they try to make themselves amends for the restrictions, which regard to reputation, interest, or health may impose.—But God especially requires purity of heart, and truth in the inward parts, by which real religion is distinguished from hypocrisy.—“Ye fools,” says our Lord, to some of these whited sepulchres, “did not he that made that which is without, make that which is within also? Thou

“ blind Pharisee, first cleanse that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside may be clean also¹.” How would it astonish us, if we could see all that passes in the thoughts of many very *virtuous* persons, during a single day ! and as to the imaginations of the profligate ; they are the very residence of evil spirits, in which they forge all manner of abominable crimes, previous to the actual commission of them. Instead therefore of men’s hearts being better than their lives, as self-flattery often suggests, they are uniformly far worse : for every sinful word and action was at first an evil thought and desire ; but ten thousand evil thoughts and desires conceived and cherished in the heart, proceed no further ; because men have not opportunity, courage, or ability to realize them in practice.

Every man, however, must judge for himself in this matter : but let us ask ourselves, whether we should feel comfortable, at the idea of *all* our secret thoughts being disclosed, I do not say to the whole world, but to our intimate friends and acquaintance ?—Yet they must all be disclosed to men and angels, at the great day of righteous retribution !—“ Let then the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his *thoughts* :” for unless evil thoughts are excluded or opposed, every apparent reformation must be hypocritical.

¹ Matt. xxiii. 25—28. Luke, xi. 39, 40.

“ O Jerusalem, wash thy heart from wickedness; how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?” Peter seems even to intimate a doubt, whether the thought of Simon Magus’s heart did not constitute the unpardonable sin; “ Pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” This is therefore a matter of the greatest importance: and the discovery of those secret thoughts, which no human eye could reach, and which were scarcely ever suspected, will exceedingly help to discriminate characters at the great day. Nay, the countless multitude of vile imaginations and desires, which are the spontaneous production of our depraved nature, will greatly illustrate the truth and justice of God, in all his declarations and decisions, concerning the workers of iniquity.

On the other hand, the thoughts of believers also will be made known, when the Lord shall come. Then it will appear, that they abhorred, and laboured to exclude, every evil imagination, and to repress all sinful desires: that they humbly mourned over the vain-glorious, envious, impatient, and peevish emotions of their hearts; and that they endeavoured to employ their minds, during their retired hours, in holy contemplations.— It will then be known how much their thoughts

¹ Jer. iv. 14.

² Acts, viii, 20—24.

were occupied in considering by what means they might best glorify God, and serve their generation ; and how many desires they felt and plans they formed, which they could not accomplish.— Their affectionate longings after the salvation of their relatives, neighbours, and persecutors ; and the anguish of heart which they felt on their account, even when censured as severe and harsh in reproving and warning them, will be brought to light ;| with all other pious, holy, and benevolent thoughts and desires ; and these discoveries will evidence them to have been the genuine followers of the holy Jesus.

We must even go further still in this matter : the state of every man's heart, and the motives of his actions will then be fully disclosed. The admired morality of numbers will then be demonstrated to have been only a modification of self-love ; without any real regard to the authority or glory of God. The Pharisee's prayers, fasting, and almsgiving will be shewn to have resulted solely from pride and ostentation. Many will be proved to have preached the gospel from envy and strife, from avarice or ambition ; and to have professed it, as a step to emolument or distinction. In short every mask will then be taken off : many admired characters will appear completely odious and contemptible ; and “ the things which have “ been highly esteemed among men” will appear to have been “ abomination in the sight of God.”

Need I say, how tremendous this must be to dissemblers of every description, who now act a plausible part, and exhibit on the stage of the world in an assumed character?

But on the other hand, the humility, gratitude, zealous love, and holy affections of true believers will be made manifest to the universe. The pure motives of those actions, which were censured or calumniated, will be demonstrated: every accusation will be silenced, all misapprehensions removed; and it will be undeniably evident, that from the time when they made an explicit profession of the gospel, their repentance, faith, love and habitual conduct were answerable to that profession.—We proceed therefore,

III. To advert to the consequences of these discoveries.—

By them the immense difference of character, between the righteous and the wicked, will be undeniably manifested. In this world, numbers find it convenient to varnish over their crimes, to palliate or excuse many parts of their conduct, and to cast others, as it were, into the back ground, where they are little observed: while regardless of their hearts, they have leisure to place their counterfeit virtues in a conspicuous light, and to make them appear immensely better than they really are.—On the contrary, the believer has

many infirmities ; and is engaged in a sharp conflict with “ the sin that dwelleth in him,” and with the temptations of Satan. The world rigorously scrutinizes his conduct ; and the Lord tries his faith and grace, as silver is tried in the furnace.— He is so afraid of hypocrisy and ostentation, that he carefully conceals many things which might exalt his character, and scrupulously shuns the appearance of good before men, when he but suspects that there is not the reality of it in the sight of God.¹ On these and other accounts, the apparent difference betwixt true Christians, and specious hypocrites or moralists, bears no manner of proportion to the degree in which their characters do really differ. But the discoveries of the great day will perfectly distinguish them, and all the world will “ discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.”

When the Lord shall thus “ bring to light the hidden things of darkness,” every mouth will be “ stopped, and all the world will become guilty before God ; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God.²” The discoveries of the great decisive day will completely elucidate this fundamental doctrine of Christianity, which is now so generally misunderstood or opposed : for the whole of men’s thoughts,

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 6.

² Rom. iii. 19, 20.

words, and works will appear so contrary to the holy precepts of God, or so far short of their spiritual perfection; that all must then feel the force of David's words, "If thou Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" As therefore "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," all must fall under condemnation, who are not interested in the salvation of the gospel. But it may be asked, in what sense then will every man be judged according to his works? This shall be reserved for the subject of a separate discourse: and it may suffice to answer at present, that all avowed unbelievers, however distinguished, will be judged and condemned for the sins they have committed; and all professed believers will be judged according to their works, as proving, or disproving, the sincerity of their profession.

The discoveries of this awful day will likewise silence all the blasphemies, which are continually uttered, against the justice of God in the condemnation of the wicked. It is on this account, called "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." While men conceal or palliate by far the greatest and worst part of their conduct, they may argue plausibly against the denunciations of scripture: but when the whole of their character and conduct shall be openly exhibited, and all the world shall know every thing respecting them which is now seen by

the heart-searching Judge alone; then the justice of the tremendous sentence will be universally acknowledged; the friends of God will perceive and adore his glory in this part of his moral government; and the wicked shall be silent in darkness and despair, when compelled to “Depart accursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Far be it from us to suppose, that the merciful Saviour, who is TRUTH itself, would use such language, if not really applicable to the case! He does not allow us to speak deceitfully for him; and will he utter fallacious words himself?—Yet we cannot hear of eternal punishment, unquenchable fire, outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, a worm that never dieth, and the place prepared for the devil and his angels, without feeling our hearts tremble, and revolt against the description.—How unspeakably dreadful then will be the accomplishment! when the Lord, to stop the sinner’s mouth, by a discovery of his crimes, shall say, with stern indignation, “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself, but I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes!—Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver!” Cease then,

† Ps. l. 21, 22.

poor sinner, to object and dispute ; and make haste to flee from the wrath to come, and to seek refuge in the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A more pleasing subject, however, is before us, while we contemplate the redeemed of the Lord, saved by his grace, washed from their sins in the Saviour's atoning blood, completely justified, absolved from every charge, and "presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." Then death will be swallowed up in victory ; and raptures inexpressible will commence a felicity, still to be increased, with the enlargement of their capacities, through the countless ages of eternity.—But I must leave it to your own minds, brethren, to form some conception of the opposite sensations which will delight, or agonize every heart, when the wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal."

"And then shall every man have praise of God." Then every humble believer, according to his measure of faith and grace, will be honoured with the commendation of his condescending Lord, for those services which the world condemned, and which perhaps his brethren undervalued or censured. To be accosted by the Judge of the world, in these most gracious terms, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," will form an adequate gratification to the noblest ambition, of which the rational nature is capable. Seeking for this glory, honour, and

immortality, let us here be indifferent to all human applauses or contemptuous reproaches. This is the honour that cometh from God only, and is reserved for all his saints ; when no more danger shall remain of their being exalted above measure, or sacrilegiously ascribing any thing to themselves : but when, on the contrary, “ they will cast their “ crowns before the throne,” and return all to the bounteous Giver, in endless songs of adoring praise. Let us not faint then, on account of our trials and difficulties ; “ For our light afflictions “ which are but for a moment are working for us, “ a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Let us also remember the caution, “ judge no- “ thing before the time.” Our duty often requires us to form some judgment of men’s characters and actions : but in all other respects, our business is with ourselves and the Lord,—and not with our fellow servants. And the more diligent we are, “ to be found of him in peace, with- “ out spot and blameless ;” the less time and thought we shall have to spare, for censuring and condemning the conduct, or suspecting the motives, of other men.

But do you, my friends, really believe these things ? and are you preparing to meet your Judge ? I fear, the actions, conversation, and spirit of numbers awfully prove the contrary. Still, however, the Lord waits to be gracious : flee then to him as a Saviour, without longer delay, who will

speedily come to be your Judge.—You who profess the gospel, be advised and persuaded to examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith : look well to it that your evidences of conversion are clear and decisive ; for that day, of which we speak, will detect multitudes of self-deceivers, as well as unmask many artful hypocrites. And if you are conscious of following the Lord with an upright heart ; take heed that you do not slacken your diligence, or yield to unwatchfulness : “ Let your loins be girded and your lights burning ; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord :” for blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching ; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them¹. “ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord : for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

¹ Luke, xii. 35—38.

SERMON IX.

ROMANS, ii. 6—9.

*Who will render to every man according to his deeds :
to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing,
seek for glory, and honour, and immortality;
eternal life : but unto them that are contentious,
and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteous-
ness ; indignation and wrath ; tribulation and
anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.*

IN meditating on the solemnities, discoveries, and consequences of that great decisive day, when the Lord shall come to be our Judge ; we were obliged to pass over in a general manner, several important particulars relative to the subject : and especially we reserved for a separate discourse, the consideration of the manner, in which all men will be judged according to their works, and receive according to what they have done, whether it be good or evil. The present will therefore be an appendix to the preceding discourse, as intended to illustrate its interesting truths, and to render

them more perspicuous and impressive. In the passage before us, the apostle does not undertake to decide a controverted point of doctrine, to state the method of a sinner's justification, or to account for that difference of character which actually subsists among the descendants of fallen Adam. These subjects he has fully discussed in other parts of his writings: but here he takes occasion from his subject to shew, that the opposite conduct of the righteous and the wicked will terminate in future happiness or misery. He considers some persons more favoured by providence than others, as the Jews had every way the advantage of the gentiles: but he intimates that they generally abused those advantages to their deeper condemnation: "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" The more kind, patient, and merciful the Lord is, the baser our rebellion and ingratitude must appear, the greater cause have we to repent, and the more abundant motives and encouragements. But if men presume on his lenity, supposing that he will not or cannot punish, and so encourage themselves in sin, they "despise the riches of his goodness and mercy;" and "after their hardness and impenitent heart, treasure up to themselves wrath, against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according

“to his deeds.” The treasures, which they, perhaps covetously and dishonestly, accumulate on earth, must be left to their survivors: but the vast accessions, which they daily make to their load of guilt, and the heavy wrath of God against them, are laid up for *themselves*, to be their future and eternal portion. For at the great day of righteous retribution, God “will render unto every
“man according to his deeds: to them who by
“patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory,
“and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but
“unto them that are contentious, and do not obey
“the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation
“and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every
“soul of man that doeth evil.”—In discoursing on these words, I shall endeavour,

I. To describe more fully the two characters contrasted by the apostle, and to shew the doom reserved for each.

II. Compare the statement thus made with several other important scriptures, which may serve to elucidate and confirm it.

III. Explain more precisely the rule of judgment, as delivered in the sacred oracles: and

IV. Make some particular application of the subject.

I. Then I shall endeavour to describe more fully the two characters contrasted by the apostle, and to shew the doom reserved for each.

The apostle's reasoning throughout this whole epistle proves, that he was speaking of sinners under a dispensation of mercy. He therefore considers a man, thus circumstanced, proposing to himself the acquisition of glory, and honour, and immortality. Such a purpose must imply a belief of the scriptural doctrine, concerning the perfections and government of God, the immortality of the soul, and a future state of righteous retribution: with a persuasion that eternal happiness is attainable even by sinners, in the way which the Lord hath revealed. At the same time the man is convinced, that the blessing must be sought with diligence and self-denial, and that it ought to be preferred before all other objects whatever. Thus, while "there be many that say, Who will shew us any good,"—"seeking every man his gain from his quarter," pursuing worldly pleasures, honours, and distinctions, or wasting their lives in sloth and dissipation; he "seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and "labours for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life." He is now become a candidate for "glory, and honour, and immortality:" and nothing, inferior to an endless inheritance and unfading joys, can satisfy the vast desires of his

heart. Whatever he renounces, ventures, or suffers, he resolves to seek “a kingdom that cannot be moved.” He feels the force of our Lord’s questions, “What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” He does not, however, merely seek deliverance from wrath and misery; he is also athirst for happiness in the enjoyment of God, and of those “pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore.” He attends to religion, not that he may be seen of men, or acquire reputation; nor is he solely intent on pacifying an uneasy conscience: but as a reasonable creature, formed for an immortal existence, he aims, in this introductory scene, to ensure felicity in the world to come. He “believes that God is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him;” and therefore he seeks his favour, as “the one thing needful,” and endeavours to render all other objects and pursuits subservient to this grand concern.

It is evident that men of this stamp are very scarce; and that most of those, who are called Christians, are wholly strangers to this habitual purpose and conduct. The few, who answer the description, are not confined to any single sect, but are scattered about in the visible church, as “men wondered at” for their singularity and preciseness. Now, at whatever period of life, any man is thus brought “to seek glory, and honour, and immortality,” he enters on a new state, and

constitutes a new character; "being made free
"from sin, he becomes the servant of God, has
"his fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting
"life."

These persons seek the desired good "by patient
"continuance in well doing." A sinner cannot
be said *to do well*, until he humbles himself before
God for his transgressions, mourns for them in
true repentance, confesses them with self-
abhorrence and a sincere purpose of forsaking
them, and seeks mercy in the way which God
hath appointed, for the glory of his own name
and the honour of his violated law. A rebel
can do nothing well, so long as he vindicates
and persists in his rebellion, refuses mercy
because the terms of it are too humiliating,
and is wholly averse to submission and re-
newed allegiance. The prodigal son, when he
came to himself, and determined to return home,
and humbly craved his father's forgiveness, began
to do well. The proud morality, formal devotion,
or ostentatious liberality, of an impenitent
sinner, will never meet the approbation of that
God, who sent his Son into the world, "not to
call the "righteous but sinners to repentance."
Humble penitents, and they alone, begin to
answer to the character described by the apostle.

All such persons will likewise credit the
testimony of God concerning his Son, and the
way of acceptance through his atonement and
mediation. Whatever modern reasoners may
plausibly advance

concerning the *innocence of error*, and the small importance of doctrinal truth: the inspired writers uniformly consider unbelief as springing from an evil heart; and false doctrines, as *damnable heresies*, and *strong delusions*, which God permits for the punishment of those who hate the truth, because they love sin.—“How can ye believe, who receive “honour one of another?” “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and “men love darkness rather than light, *because “their deeds are evil.*” “He that believeth on the “Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth “not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath “of God abideth on him.” This is a fair specimen of the scriptural declarations on this subject; and as Christ “is the Way, the Truth, and the “Life, and no man cometh to the Father but by “him;” we may assuredly infer, that no one *does well*, according to the apostle’s meaning, who believes not in the Son of God, but refuses to seek eternal life as the gift of God in him.

The Lord hath instituted in his holy word, certain ordinances, as means of grace to our souls, and that in them we may render him the glory due unto his name. The characters, of whom we speak, will certainly honour the Lord and seek his blessing, by a diligent and conscientious observance of these ordinances. They will also separate

* John, iii. 16—21. 36.

from bad company, avoid temptations and occasions of sin, exercise self-denial, and renounce all pleasures or interests, which interfere with the exercise of divine love and the obedience of faith; and they will prove the sincerity of their religious profession, by observing the directions, and copying the example of the Lord Jesus, and by walking in newness of life.

Numbers, like the stony-ground hearers, shew much earnestness in these things, and express great confidence and joy: yet they are partial in obedience, and continue but for a time. They readily perform such duties, as are creditable, cheap, and easy; but they refuse to part with Herodias, or to cut off the offending right hand; they do not mortify constitutional or customary evils, reject unhallowed gain, venture the displeasure of rich and powerful friends, or attend to those things in religion, which would expose them to contempt, reproach, and hardship.—Thus they maintain a religious profession, while exempted from peculiar trials; and many pass through life, unsuspected by themselves or others: but “if persecution or tribulation arise because of the word, by and by persons of this character are offended.”—On the contrary, they, of whom we now speak, have “received the good seed into an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience.” They are not partial in their religion, but shew themselves the friends of Christ, by doing whatsoever

he commands them. They have indeed many infirmities, and may fall into sin through inadvertency; they may even live in some sinful neglect or practice, through ignorance or mistake, but cannot habitually commit known sin. They search out their faults; and, as they discover any, repent of and forsake them. "Their hearts are sound in the Lord's statutes, and they shall never be ashamed."

In this course of believing obedience, the disciples of Christ encounter many temptations, struggle with various discouragements, and are exposed to sharp trials. The contempt and hatred of the world, the assaults of the tempter, the peculiarities of their circumstances, dispositions, and habits and the chastisements of their heavenly Father, combine to try their patience. Perseverance and constancy, in following the dictates of conscience, expose them to the charge of obstinacy and perverseness, or subject them to heavy losses and difficulties; while inward conflicts, permitted to humble and prove them, sometimes make them ready to faint and despond.—Yet they "patiently continue in well-doing;" they submit to the will of God under afflictions, meekly bear injuries, wait the appointed time for the fulfilment of the Lord's promises, and persevere in the path of upright obedience. They seek for blessings which cannot be expected in any other way: and are ready to say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words

“of eternal life.”—Their religion resembles a river, which still continues to flow, though sometimes with a fuller current, and at others with a diminished stream: while that of the hypocrite resembles a land-flood, now impetuously deluging the field, and then wholly disappearing. But to those, who thus “patiently continue in well-doing,” and to them only, will the righteous Judge at last assign the eternal inheritance. “He that continueth to end shall be saved.”

We need not enlarge on the reverse of this character. “Unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.” Such persons, instead of believing the gospel, and in humble repentance embracing the promised salvation, contend against it, “contradicting and blaspheming.” They dispute against the strictness of the divine law or justice, and the sentence denounced against transgressors. They oppose their own reasonings again the express testimony of God, in respect of the mysteries of redemption; and venture to charge him foolishly, as if they were more wise and righteous than He.—Being thus “contentious, they do not obey the truth;” they will not submit to God, repent of sin, believe in Christ, separate from the world, or walk in newness of life. For

“ they obey unrighteousness:” sin, in one form or other, has dominion over them; and their unbelief is the effect of a depraved heart and a rebellious will, which it tends reciprocally to confirm and render more desperate. To all these the righteous Judge will recompense “ indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish;” not regarding their outward privileges or distinctions, but deciding impartially according to their works: for, “ there is no respect of persons with God.” Let us then,

II. Compare this statement with several other important scriptures, which may serve to elucidate and confirm it.

It is the uniform declaration of the sacred writers, that all men shall be judged according to their works: yet it is equally evident that faith, or unbelief, determines a man’s state in the sight of God, as justified, or as under condemnation. “ He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life.” “ He that believeth not is condemned already: because he hath not believed in the name of the

“ only begotten Son of God.” The same instruction is implied in the apostle’s vision. “ The books
 “ were opened: and another book was opened, which
 “ is the book of life; and the dead were judged out
 “ of those things, which were written in the books
 “ according to their works; and whosoever was
 “ not found written in the book of life, was cast
 “ into the lake of fire.”²

The prophet, having shewn that the ways of the Lord are equal, was led to state the characters of the righteous and the wicked; and then he adds, “ When the wicked man turneth away from his
 “ wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and
 “ right, he shall save his soul alive;—repent and
 “ turn from all your transgressions, so iniquity
 “ shall not be your ruin.”³ The true penitent therefore will not be condemned, when judged according to his deeds; which he must be, if the solemn process should be conducted according to the strictness of the law, without reference to the grace of the gospel; to which all these invitations and promises belong.

The atoning sacrifices of the Mosaick law, which typified the redemption of Christ, were offered upon mount Zion: and David, enquiring who should ascend and worship with acceptance on that holy hill, draws a character, which entirely accords with that given of a true believer in the new Testament.⁴

² Mark, xvi. 16. John, iii. 18. v. 24. ² Rev. xx. 12—15.

³ Ezekiel xviii. 27—30. ⁴ Ps. xv.

Thus he shews us, *which of the professors of true religion* will stand accepted in the day of judgment: but this hath nothing to do with such as openly neglect or oppose revealed truth, or refuse the salvation of the gospel.

In perfect harmony with these scriptures, our Lord describes his true disciples, “Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, my sister, and my mother.” “Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.”¹ This word or will of God doubtless has peculiar relation to Christ, and the voice from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him:” and a moral or pharisaical decency of conduct most essentially differs from the obedience of faith. “He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son; he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”² The unbeliever, therefore, whatever his moral character may be, so far from doing the will of God, disobeys his express command, and deliberately affronts his veracity.

Our Lord closed his sermon on the mount with this remarkable passage. “Not every one that saith

¹ Matt. xii. 49, 50.. Luke, xi. 28. ² 1 John, v, 10—12,

“unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the king-
 “dom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of
 “my Father which is in heaven. Many will say
 “to me *in that day*, Lord, Lord, have we not pro-
 “phesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out
 “devils? and in thy name done many wonderful
 “works? and *then* will I profess unto them, I ne-
 “ver knew you, depart from me ye that work ini-
 “quity. Therefore whosoever heareth these say-
 “ings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him
 “unto a wise man, which built his house upon a
 “rock; and the rain descended, and the floods
 “came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that
 “house and it fell not; for it was founded upon a
 “rock. And every one that heareth these sayings
 “of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened
 “unto a foolish man, which built his house upon
 “the sand; and the rains descended and the floods
 “came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that
 “house and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

This passage evidently refers to the day of judg-
 ment; but it mentions none except those who
 call Christ Lord, come to him, and hear his say-
 ings. His professed disciples therefore are exclu-
 sively intended; and living faith is described as
 distinguishable from dead faith by its holy fruits.
 Disobedient professors of Christianity will be con-
 demned as hypocrites, or wicked and slothful ser-

vants; and avowed unbelievers as “enemies who would not have the Son of God to reign over them.”

But the solemn description of the great decisive day, given us by the Judge himself, is most conclusive on the subject². In this important scripture, acts of kindness, shewn to believers for the sake of Christ, are the only deeds mentioned, as the reason for the rejoicing words addressed to the righteous, “Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.” And no charge is brought against the wicked, but their omission of such duties, when the sentence is denounced, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Yet it will then appear, that the righteous have performed many other good works of divers kinds, and that the wicked have been guilty of numerous other crimes and omissions. Why then did our Lord mention these things exclusively? Doubtless, because he supposed them to constitute the most conclusive evidence of genuine faith, or unbelief. Beneficence, not springing from love to Christ, nor exercised towards his disciples, his *brethren* or representatives, cannot be here intended, as many have inconsiderately imagined, for who will say, that an indiscriminate liberality: connected with an

¹ Matt. xxv. 30. Luke, xix. 21—27. ² Matt. xxv. 31—46.

ungodly licentious life, will entitle a man to the heavenly inheritance? Or if any should venture on such an assertion, would *they* also allow, that the want of this beneficence will expose a man to the awful doom here denounced, however free from vice, or adorned with other virtues, his character may have been? Or will any one maintain, that the liberality of infidels to one another, from whatever motive, answers to our Lord's words, "I was hungry and ye gave *me* meat;—for as much as ye did it to the least of these *my brethren*, ye did it unto *me*?"—Indeed a measure of the same absurdities attaches to every other interpretation of this passage; except that which goes upon the following principles, gathered from the several parts of the sacred volume. There is no salvation for sinners, except by the mercy of God through Jesus Christ; no interest in this salyation without faith; no true faith, except that which worketh by love; no love to Christ is genuine which is not accompanied by special love to his disciples; and no love to the brethren is unfeigned, which does not influence a man to alleviate their distresses, supply their wants, and do them good, as he hath opportunity and ability. This love is the fruit of the Spirit: where the Spirit of Christ dwells, all the fruits of the Spirit will be produced: and "if any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his." A detail of particulars would not have suited the majesty of our Lord's description: the

most prominent distinguishing feature of believers and unbelievers was selected; and thus an intimation was given of the rule of judgment, sufficiently clear to the humble student of scripture, though others may mistake or pervert it. In this view of it the whole is obvious, and coincides with other testimonies of the sacred writers. “We know that “we have passed from death unto life, because “*we love the brethren*’.” “Seeing ye have purified your hearts through the Spirit, unto unfeigned *love of the brethren*; see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently; being born again—by the word of God².” “If a brother or sister be naked, or destitute of daily food, and one of you say, depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit?” “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth: and hereby we know, that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him³.” So that love of the brethren, shewn in active kindness, is uniformly required as evidence of our faith in Christ and love to his name.

These reflections elucidate the following scriptures also, and are confirmed by them. “Know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead.”

¹ 1 John, iii. 14.

² 1 Pet. i. 22, 23.

³ Jam. ii. 15, 16.

1 John, iii. 18, 19.

“ The grace of God that bringeth salvation—teach-
 “ eth us, that, denying ungodliness and world-
 “ ly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously,
 “ and godly in this present world; looking for
 “ that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of
 “ the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ;
 “ who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all
 “ iniquity, and to purify to himself a peculiar
 “ people, zealous of good works.”

One most solemn and affecting passage still re-
 mains to be considered: “ The Lord Jesus shall
 “ be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking
 “ vengeance on them that know not God, and
 “ that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus
 “ Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting
 “ destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and
 “ from the glory of his power; when he shall come
 “ to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in
 “ all them that believe.” We are here expressly
 informed, that at the day of judgment all will be
 condemned, who have not *known God, and obeyed
 the gospel*; but how many persons of moral char-
 acter and external respectability will be found in
 that company! No exceptions, however, are inti-
 mated; the saints, even those that believe, will
 alone stand accepted by the Judge; and all else
 will be punished with everlasting destruction from
 his presence,

¹ Tit. ii. 11—14. ² 2 Thess. i. 5—12.

I shall conclude this part of the subject, with the words which Christ spake to his servant John, “Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.—I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the Tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”¹ But to whom does the title and privilege of the Tree of life belong? Surely to the true believer, who loves Christ, and keeps his commandments. “Ye are my friends,” says he, “if ye do whatsoever I command you.”

This view of the subject harmonizes the whole scripture, and reconciles those parts which seem to be contrary to each other: but when this centre of unity is overlooked, men either “go about to establish their own righteousness,” or run into antinomianism. These two extremes are the *Scylla* and *Charibdis*, the fatal rock or dreadful whirlpool, of our perilous voyage. I have therefore endeavoured to mark out the safe passage between them; and may the Holy Spirit guide us at a distance from these, and all other dangers, on the right hand and on the left! We proceed then,

III. To state more explicitly, and shew more

¹ Rev. xxii. 12—14.

precisely, the rules of judgment, as delivered in the sacred oracles.

It is most evident, that the scripture was intended principally for those who bestow pains to understand it: and this obvious reflection illustrates the propriety of the descriptions there given of the great decisive day; for they certainly relate almost exclusively to those who profess the religion of the Bible. We cannot therefore infer any thing from these descriptions, concerning those who have not been favoured with revelation, or have rejected it: though other scriptures give some light on the subject. The holy law is the unalterable rule of right and wrong, in respect of all men however distinguished: nor is it possible, that God should judge of characters and actions by any other rule; for the law is the exact reflection of his infinite holiness, and he cannot deny himself. He can, however, pardon the guilty, and make allowance for unavoidable disadvantages. “They who know not the will of God and do it not, shall be beaten with few stripes: but they who know and refuse to do his will shall be beaten with many stripes.”¹ It will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those who heard the doctrines

¹ Luke, xii, 47, 48.

and saw the miracles of Christ, and did not repent and believe the gospel.

The apostle therefore adds, a few verses after the text; “as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law.” They have indeed violated the perfect rule of duty: but, as they had not the advantage of the written word, they will not be liable to so heavy a condemnation, as wicked Jews and Christians: yet as they acted against the dictates of their own reason and conscience, those remains of the law originally written in the heart, they “will perish without law.” For “being a law to themselves,” their consciences may indeed excuse some parts of their conduct, but they must condemn others; especially in the day, when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ: so that “every mouth will be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.” All, except idiots (who scarcely can be thought accountable creatures), know far better than they practise, and might know much more, were not their hearts set against the truth through love of sin. All men must therefore be condemned according to this rule and the number, and aggravation of their crimes, compared with the measure of their advantages, is the standard, by which their punishment will be ascertained, by the infinitely righteous Judge.

What the Lord may do *in mercy* to any of his sinful creatures, it does not become us to enquire, beyond what he hath seen good to reveal: but we have no ground to suppose that any who die without spiritual religion can be happy in another world; and neither scripture nor history countenance the opinion, that the Lord gives his sanctifying Spirit, where he has not sent some measure of the light of revelation.—We are sure, however, that the state of pagans will be far better, than that of wicked Christians, so called. While we therefore rejoice in our privileges; we may tremble, lest they should increase our condemnation: and the state of the nations, who still sit in darkness and the shadow of death, should animate our endeavours, and excite our prayers for their conversion.

The apostle adds, “as many as have sinned under the law, shall be judged by the law.” The Jews rejected the gospel, and sought justification by the works of the law. Deists discard revelation, and rely on their own moral conduct to recommend them to God; and various descriptions of professed Christians form a complex law of works, out of the religion of the new Testament. But whatever system, men favoured with revelation may adopt, if they put the event of the great decisive day, on their own works, as the ground of their confidence; they will be judged according to the holy law of God, and fall under its awful curse. “Christ is

“ become of none effect to them: they are fallen
“ from grace, and become debtors to do the whole
“ law.¹” The advantages such men enjoy, the
crimes they commit, their proud aversion to the
humbling salvation of the gospel, and the degree
of their enmity and opposition to the truth, will
determine the measure of their guilt and punish-
ment, according to the decision of unerring wis-
dom, and infinite justice.

Some observations have already been made on
the case of those, who allow the doctrines of
Christianity, renounce dependence on their own
works, and profess to expect pardon, righteousness,
and eternal life, “ as the gift of God, through
“ Jesus Christ our Lord.” Such persons, when
the Lord shall come, will be judged according to
this profession; and if their faith be shewn to have
been living and genuine, by its holy fruits, ac-
cording to the discoveries which have been men-
tioned, they will as justified believers receive the
reward of righteousness; and their future glory
and felicity will be proportioned to the degree of
their grace and obedience of faith. But if their
conduct and dispositions have proved, that they
were not true believers; they will remain under
the condemnation of the law, aggravated by their
abuse of the gospel; and so have their portion with
hypocrites and unbelievers.

¹ Gal v. 1—6.

IV. Then let us make some particular application of the subject.

It has been before remarked, that “we *must* all appear before the judgment seat of Christ;” and let this reflection sink deep into every heart. Men voluntarily break the laws of their country, but dire compulsion takes place, when they are convicted and executed for their crimes. The young man, rejoicing in his vigour and flow of spirits, may give a loose to his passions; but let him remember that “for all these things God will bring him into judgment.”—You may now forget God; but he will not forget you, or any of your works. You may affront his justice, and despise his mercy: but he will shortly say, “It is a people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will have no mercy on them.”¹ Now is the day of the Lord’s patience; but the day of wrath and perdition of ungodly men approacheth: now he invites you to draw near to his throne of grace; shortly he will summon you to his awful tribunal. “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him, while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” “Strive to enter in at the

¹ Is. xxvii. 11.

“ strait gate, for many—shall seek to enter in, and
 “ shall not be able. When once the master of the
 “ house is risen up, and hath shut to the door;” it
 will be for ever in vain for those that stand with-
 out, to cry, “ Lord, Lord, open to us.” Now the
 Saviour pleads with you, in accents of tenderest
 love; “ how long ye simple ones will ye love sim-
 “ plicity, and scorners delight in their scorning, and
 “ fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof,
 “ I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make
 “ known my words unto you.” But, ere long, he
 will frown on the impenitent and unbelieving, and
 say, “ Because I called and ye refused, I stretched
 “ out my hands and no man regarded;—therefore
 “ shall ye eat the fruit of your own ways, and be
 “ filled with your own devices.”—“ Oh that men
 “ were wise, that they understood these things,
 “ that they would consider their latter end! ”

But will any of you, with this solemn season of
 discovery and decision before your eyes, delibe-
 rately put the event of it upon the goodness of
 your hearts and lives? Is there not in your very
 soul an involuntary shrinking from so strict and
 awful a scrutiny? Do you not feel a disposition to
 say, “ Enter not into judgment with thy servant,
 “ O Lord?” “ If thou, Lord, shouldst mark ini-
 “ quity, O Lord, who may stand?” As you value

¹ Prov. 1. 19—31. Deut. xxxii. 29.

your immortal souls, do not now insist on any plea, which you feel to be inadmissible in the great day of righteous retribution. Stand not on any distinction between your case and that of your fellow sinners. Seek above all things an interest in the atonement and righteousness of Christ; and count all but loss, that you may win him, and be found in him. Disregard the scorn and reproach of an unbelieving world; anticipating that day, when every eye shall see the despised Redeemer, and his favour be universally allowed of more value than ten thousand worlds. "Let every one," however, "that nameth the name of Christ depart from all iniquity." "If we say that we have faith, and have not works, will faith save us," in the day "when the Lord shall render unto every man according to his deeds?"—Alas! a dead faith, a presumptuous hope, and an unsound profession, will only increase the anguish and shame of final condemnation.

Even if we be true believers, negligence and loose walking will cloud our evidence, and weaken our warranted confidence: while the greatest possible encouragement is given to all genuine good works, by that very system, which excludes boasting, and allows none of our services the least share in our justification before God. "Not a cup of cold water given to a disciple, from love to Christ, shall lose its reward." He will accept every kindness to those whom we look upon as his

brethren, even as if we had done it to him in person: and while we forgive injuries, love enemies, deny ourselves, endure hardships, or bear any cross, from love to his name, and desire to adorn and recommend his gospel; he notices our poor services, and will applaud and reward them before men and angels.—Nay, if he observe, that we form plans and make attempts to promote his cause and be serviceable to his people; even though he see good to disappoint our endeavours; he will kindly accept the zealous intention, and openly say, “Thou didst well that it was in thine heart.” “Let us not therefore be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not:” and “may we all find mercy of the Lord in that day of retribution,” and have an abundant entrance into his kingdom of everlasting glory and felicity.

SERMON X.

I TIMOTHY, vi. 6.

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

THE desire of gain, in one form or another, is universal: for though no one can seek the true riches for himself, without disinterested love to God and his neighbour; yet love to himself and thirst after happiness cannot be extinguished; being essential to our nature as God originally constituted it, and not superinduced by the entrance of sin. If, however, the apostle's compendious maxim were generally believed, how many vain projects would be superseded! What fatigues, dangers, anxieties, envies, contentions, frauds, oppressions, wars, murders, and mischiefs might be prevented!

The context is worthy of our peculiar attention. The servants in those days were generally slaves; and it frequently happened that Christians were the property of pagans. Such a condition is commonly thought very wretched, and slaves have

seldom escaped cruel usage: yet the apostle elsewhere says, “Art thou called being a servant? care not for it.” The Christian slave is Christ’s freed man; for, “if the Son make you free, then are ye free indeed:” but the ungodly master is in deplorable bondage; “for he that committeth sin, is the servant of sin.”

In this view of the subject the apostle says, “Let as many servants, as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honour: that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.” For if Christian servants behaved less respectfully to their masters, than others did; the heathens would blame their religion, as teaching them to violate the duties of their station. “And they,” says he, “that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit.” No doubt the involuntary servitude of those, who have not, by atrocious crimes forfeited their liberty, is inconsistent with the moral law of God; and if *real* christianity should become universal, slavery must be finally abolished. But the apostles were not legislators or civil magistrates: as ministers of religion, they taught men how to act in their several situations *as matters then stood*: and when the rulers embraced the gospel, it was proper they too should be taught their duty, and instructed to apply a legal and regular remedy to

the evil. But it would have exceedingly increased the opposition made to the gospel, if the preachers of it had attempted, by their own influence to subvert the existing system in this respect; or even required Christian masters indiscriminately to liberate their slaves. Whereas, if they were taught to use them as brethren, the ends of humanity would be effectually answered, as to the individuals concerned, and the example would have the most salutary tendency.

Having stated this matter, the apostle next shewed the sources and consequences of the contrary doctrine; exhorted Timothy to withdraw from vain disputers, who “supposed that gain was godliness:” and then subjoined the words of the text, “but godliness with contentment is great gain;” for, says he, “We brought nothing into the world, and it is certain, that we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.”—

In considering the subject we may,

I. Notice the connexion between godliness and contentment,

II. Shew in what respects godliness with contentment is great gain.

III. Deduce some practical instructions.

I. We notice the connexion between godliness and contentment, as it is evidently implied in the text.

The word *godliness* frequently occurs in the writings of the apostles, and must therefore be understood according to the tenour of their doctrine. We must not consider it merely, as a proper regulation of our affections and conduct towards God, according to the first table of the moral law; but as implying especially the dispositions and demeanour, suited to a sinner under a dispensation of mercy, and invited to reconciliation with his offended God, through the Mediator of the new covenant.

When this has been duly attended to it will evidently appear, that deep humility and unfeigned repentance constitute an essential part of evangelical godliness; for unless we habitually possess this frame of mind, we cannot sincerely make those confessions and supplications, or present those sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, which are peculiar to Christianity. Now every reflecting man must perceive, that deep humility, accompanied with cheering hope, exceedingly tends to produce contentment. A vast proportion of the impatience and fretfulness of mankind results from a false estimate of their own merits and consequence. This induces them to consider their trials great, their comforts few and trivial, the

least affront intolerable; and every kind and degree of respect inadequate, except unqualified adulation and submission. But such views of Jehovah and the adoring seraphim, as filled Isaiah with self-abasement; or such apprehensions of the divine majesty, as caused Job to "abhor himself, " and repent in dust and ashes," would give them very different views in these respects. Did they enter into the feelings of the apostle, when he called himself the "chief of sinners," and "less than the least of all saints;" were they ready to own with the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; or with John Baptist, "I am not worthy to loose his shoe-latchet;" a total revolution would take place in all their sentiments and sensations about outward comforts and trials, and the usage they meet with from those around them. The sharpest affliction would then appear light and momentary, compared with their deserts; the meanest provision would be received with lively gratitude; while with the patriarch they confessed, "we are not worthy of the least of all thy mercies:" the most unfavourable situation or disagreeable employment would be considered as better, than they have a right to expect: and in the greatest injuries or affronts, they would submit to the justice of God, who may correct or punish by whatever instruments he pleases.

Humble thoughts of themselves reconcile men

to obscure stations, mean circumstances, and common occupations, as most suited to them: and when they are evidently called to more publick services, they enter on them with reluctance and diffidence; except as lively faith renders them superior to their fears, and a sense of duty engages them to proceed. Such men are ready to stoop, and in honour to prefer others; they do not complain of being buried in situations, where they are undervalued or neglected. They “think soberly of themselves, and as they ought to think;” and this secures them from manifold disappointments and vexations, to which other men are exposed. ‘That will break a proud man’s *heart*, which will scarcely break a humble man’s sleep:’ and it is certain that many of the troubles of life affect our peace almost in exact proportion to the degree of our pride or humility. The common opinion therefore, that self-abasement produces melancholy, and that a favourable opinion of ourselves tends to cheerfulness, is an egregious mistake. The former may indeed depress the spirits when connected with misapprehension, ignorance, and unbelief; and the latter may produce a flow of agreeable sensations, when nothing occurs to ruffle the mind. Such a state, however, is so seldom to be expected in this changing world, and amidst the mortifications to which self-sufficiency exposes men; that the cheerfulness depending on it must be extremely precarious: while patience,

meeekness, hope in God, and humble gratitude evidently conduce to an uniform composure and serenity; the direct contrast to disappointed pride and ambition, rankling resentment, sickening envy, and rebellious murmurs.

Even godly sorrow for sin, when accompanied with a humble hope of mercy, produces a tender pleasure, a melting sweetness, a serious joy, a heart-felt satisfaction, which far exceed the utmost refinements of sinful indulgence. Repentance itself, which men postpone under the notion that it is the bane of comfort, is the source of the purest and most permanent rejoicing; and the true Christian must consider those seasons, in which, melted into contrition for his sins, he sowed the seed of his future harvest with penitent tears, as but little removed from the happiest hours of his life.

Faith likewise, which in its varied exercises constitutes a most important part of evangelical godliness, is intimately connected with contentment.—As “the evidence of things not seen,” it sets before us the holy heart-searching God, and causes us to speak and act as in his immediate presence. This powerfully tends to calm our tumultuous passions; to awe our souls into adoring submission, and to encourage confidence and humble expectation. Faith descries an invisible world, and places us on the verge of eternity, as about to launch into that boundless ocean. With this prospect before us, the concerns of time

shrink into insignificancy: and all that disparity of rank or fortune, which subsists among dying men, and about which their contests, cares, and discontents are principally excited, appear like a fleeting dream, a pageant passing over the stage. Our trials also are perceived to be transient and unimportant: we feel it to be a weakness and folly greatly to disquiet ourselves about such trifles: and discover that our wisdom consists in being careful to discharge our duty, while on our pilgrimage. So that, if “we looked more to the things which are not seen,” and less to “the things which are seen:” we should certainly become more satisfied with our lot, and less anxious about our temporal provision.

Faith beholds especially the unseen Saviour; and crediting the sure testimony of God, contemplates him in all the scenes of his life and death. And whether we look to the stable and manger at Bethlehem: the cottage and carpenter’s shop at Nazareth; or the well in Samaria, where Jesus wearied with his journey sat down at noon and craved a draught of water: whether we follow him to the desert, where he was an hungered while tempted by the devil; to the field, where with up-lifted hands and eyes, he gave thanks for the barley bread and small fishes; or to the meals which he and his disciples may be supposed to have made on the broken fragments of that humble feast: or whether we meditate on his general

poverty, who had not where to lay his head; his scanty maintenance, at one time earned with the sweat of his brow, at another received as the alms of his followers; every object may teach us, "in whatever state we are therewith to be content." If we turn our thoughts to the contradiction, contempt, and insult, the injustice and cruelty, to which he voluntarily submitted: the patience, meekness, serenity, and love which he manifested, or the glorious event of his sufferings and death: we may, in every one of these reflections, as it were, hear him say, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?" Nor can we select one scene, which does not most powerfully inculcate resignation, contentment, and thankfulness, whatever our circumstances and difficulties may be. For who has meaner provision, or is more injuriously treated, than the holy One of God, the spotless Sacrifice for our numberless transgressions?

Faith receives also the instruction of Scripture, concerning the necessity, nature, and glory of the Redeemer's undertaking, and obedience unto death upon the cross: and this suggests further motives to humble submission, admiring gratitude, and cheerful acquiescence in the will of God. The worth of our immortal souls, the evil and desert of sin, our ruined condition as sinners, and the unavailing nature of all earthly possessions or distinctions, with various other interesting

subjects, are most emphatically enforced by Emmanuel's cross. Thus, while induced to use every means of securing our salvation; we cannot but grow more indifferent to subordinate interests, and better satisfied with a low and afflicted condition. In this school St. Paul learned contentment amidst his multiplied sufferings: yet were we placed in his situation we should have far better reasons for our dissatisfaction, than we have been hitherto able to alledge.

Neither must we forget, that the believer feels himself to be an habitual pensioner on the Lord's mercy and bounty. He owns that he has no resources in himself: he can neither earn nor buy any thing, but indeed owes an immense debt of which he cannot pay the smallest part. He sues continually for pardon, through the sacrifice of the divine Redeemer, who bare the wrath due to our sins, that his salvation might consist with the honour of the law and government of God: and he is a constant suppliant at the mercy-seat of his offended Sovereign, expecting invaluable blessings from his royal bounty. He lives by faith; "Christ is made of God to him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." From his fulness his wants are continually supplied; and he experiences, that his prayers are answered, his strength renewed, his hope encouraged, and his heart comforted, by waiting upon the Lord. And shall a criminal thus favoured be dissatisfied?

If he yield to murmurs or impatience under the common troubles of life, his inconsistency can only be equalled by his glaring ingratitude.

“Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” When thus reconciled, we are admitted into a covenant of friendship; “and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and the Son.” In proportion to our faith, we enjoy peace of conscience, and the privilege of bringing all our cares, fears, sorrows, wants, and temptations to him by humble prayer; “casting all our care on him who careth for us.” We become interested in all “the exceeding great and precious promises” of the gospel, and that oath by which the new covenant is confirmed; “that we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us.” We are assured, that “all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose;” and these considerations must powerfully tend to produce inward tranquillity, and that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

At the same time the godly man, in the exercise of faith, sees and acknowledges the hand of God in all the events of life. While we employ our thoughts on men or second causes, we become fretful and peevish; but when we view trials and injuries as the appointment of God, and realize his wisdom, righteousness, and truth in them,

our hearts are rendered quiet and submissive. "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Such are the effects of regarding our abode, provision, employment, and even our crosses and sorrows, as appointed by our reconciled Father; and welcoming them as salutary medicines, or necessary though painful operations, intended for our highest advantage. Nor is this exercise of faith ever wholly separated from the happy experience, that our confidence is warranted, and our expectations answered; for in numerous instances we find those things, which seemed most against us, eventually conducive to our present comfort and future advantage.

It would engage us too long to pursue the subject into its various particulars. Reverential fear, admiring love spiritual worship, well regulated passions, holy affections, with every hope and earnest of heavenly felicity, might easily be shewn to promote genuine permanent contentment.—On the contrary, whatever men may pretend or imagine, "the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt. There is no peace saith my God for the wicked" Poets and novelists have beautifully described contentment, and have often charmed their admirers into a momentary oblivion of their

sorrows: but this has made way for subsequent dissatisfaction, with every situation and employment in real life. And all men of information know very well, that many of those very writers have rankled with envy and discontent, because the publick has not rewarded their ingenuity with liberality proportioned to their self-estimation!—The citizen fancies that contentment dwells in rural obscurity; the rustick concludes that it may be found in the splendour and pleasures of the metropolis. Courtiers *pretend to think*, that this pleasing companion is inseparable from retirement: the poor erroneously imagine, that it may be found in palaces. Britons amuse themselves with descriptions of Arcadian groves: the Arcadians probably conclude, that none are so happy as the inhabitants of this favoured isle.—But pride, ambition, an uneasy conscience, resentment, disproportionate or disappointed expectation, the insipidity of enjoyment when novelty ceases, the common troubles of life, and the dread of death, render men dissatisfied and uneasy, in every place and station, from the throne to the cottage. They who have it in their power, are continually shifting from one place and pursuit to another; and such as are excluded from this privilege, envy, grudge, and murmur. The world resembles a number of people in a fever, who relish nothing, are always restless, and try by incessant change of place or posture, to escape from their uneasy

sensations ; but all their efforts are in vain. Does not this single consideration prove, that godliness is the health of the soul, and that without it there can be no abiding contentment ?

II. Then we enquire, in what respects godliness with contentment is great gain,

There are certain ends, for which especially men desire riches.—They suppose the coveted acquisition would add to their present comfort ;—secure them against many future disasters ;—furnish materials for future enjoyment ;—prove an advantage to their children ;—enable them to confer benefits on their friends and relatives ;—and put it in their power to be extensively useful. Perhaps all the *reasons*, for which men pursue riches, may be referred to these heads : for when avarice becomes so extreme, that money is coveted without any regard to its use, it degenerates into a kind of deplorable insanity.

But it may easily be shewn, that godliness with contentment answers every one of these purposes, far better than any increase of wealth. The wisest of men, who perhaps also was the wealthiest, says experimentally, “ When goods increase, they are increased that eat them : and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes ? ” It is undeniable, that in

‡ Eccles. v. 11,

creasing riches ensure additional cares, encumbrances, and dangers, rather than any accession of enjoyment. "The grounds of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:" but he was as much embarrassed about securing his abundance, as his poor neighbours were about paying their rents or maintaining their families. Nor was he the only man, who has viewed his treasures with anxious enquiries; What shall I do? where shall I secure them from danger?—Designing men find their advantage in paying court to the wealthy, and employ their ingenuity to impose upon them. Thus they are often surrounded with sycophants instead of friends: and even friends become suspected; for the cordiality of confidence is undermined by repeated deceptions, till universal suspicion damps all social intercourse, and destroys the comfort of the most cordial attachments.

Nor does the rich man enjoy any pleasure with higher relish than formerly: he soon loses the exhilaration of new acquisitions and improvements: he has less to hope and more to fear than other men: his abundance and leisure often excite him to improper indulgences: his situation feeds the distempers of his soul; and in proportion as wicked passions predominate, true enjoyment languishes. Something unpossessed, or unattainable, still makes him exclaim, "All this availeth me nothing:" "Mordecai will not bow to me:" "Naboth will not sell me his vineyard!" While the attempt

to obtain the coveted object, or revenge the imagined affront, opens the door to new crimes and miseries.—No wealth can exclude pain, sickness, the loss of friends, or death: and the most prosperous are often consumed with terrors, by the foreboding of calamities. Peace of conscience and hope of future bliss cannot be purchased, and the way, in which the wealth of ungodly men has been acquired and employed, render the thoughts of giving an account of their stewardship unspeakably tremendous.

Perhaps there is no delusion so general, or so easily detected, as the opinion that increase of wealth implies an increase of enjoyment.—Where is that man, who has risen from a bare competency to great affluence, that can honestly say, he has proportionably augmented his happiness? And what numbers confess that their prosperity has been disappointment, and “that all is vanity and vexation of spirit!”

But it hath already been shewn, that true godliness is inseparable from contentment: that it affords cordials in affliction, doubles the enjoyment of prosperity, and makes way for triumphant exultation in the prospect of death. The scripture sets before us many examples of believers, in the depth of poverty, in pain and sickness, bereft of friends or forsaken by them, insulted by persecuting enemies, conversant with stripes and imprisonment, and daily expecting a painful death; who

have nevertheless been full of comfort, and have manifested a satisfaction of soul, which made them rather the objects of congratulation than condolance: nor are similar instances wholly unknown at present. But who can conceive a man under the wrath of God, with a guilty conscience, the slave of his domineering lusts, and the sport of his restless passions, to be easy or comfortable in any situation? Godliness therefore does more towards making a man happy, than all other gains and advantages combined together.

But is not wealth a security against future disasters? Is it not a resource in sickness or old age, when trade declines, or when publick calamities deprive men of the ordinary means of subsistence?—In some cases it may be *a duty*, in many *allowable*, to make a moderate provision against such emergencies: but it is often impracticable, consistently with our various obligations to God and man; and in ten thousands of instances, it is done in a degree and manner, incompatible with the exercise of faith, and in a worldly selfish spirit. On the other hand, vast multitudes yield to impatience, distrust, envy and other tormenting passions, because they cannot succeed in their attempts to make such a provision.—But godliness is the best security against future distress. Riches still are *uncertain*, after every effort to change their nature, as late events have loudly preached to all the inhabitants of Europe. The most wealthy

have no absolute security, that they shall not end their days in a dungeon, or an alms-house. Unforeseen failures often sweep away the property of the affluent: and in publick calamities it is suddenly transferred, to the amazement of beholders; while the rich and noble are reduced to abject indigence and dependance, and their palaces are occupied by the lowest of the people! In many cases, riches are considered as criminality; and the possessors are proscribed for the sake of confiscations. When famine visits a land, the provisions that avarice had accumulated, are frequently seized by an enraged multitude: nay, often the innocent possessor of abundance falls a victim to popular fury. Thus “riches are kept for the owners of them to their hurt.” And if they prove insufficient for security in such cases; what can they avail in the agonies of pain, at the approach of death, or in the day of judgment?

But he who possesses that *great gain*, which the apostle recommends, is liable to none of this uncertainty: “No good thing will the Lord withhold from them that walk uprightly.” “Put thy trust in the Lord, and do good, dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” “Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” “For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of.”—He hath all hearts in his hand, and all riches at his disposal. He needs not to work mi-

acles, (as in the case of Elijah,) in order to accomplish these promises: yet doubtless all nature would change its course, rather than God would disappoint an expectation warranted by his holy word. We know not indeed by what way our loving Father may see good in his infinite wisdom, to take us home to himself: but we are assured that every circumstance of that event shall be arranged in the most advantageous manner; and till the appointed period shall arrive, no famine can render us destitute, no pestilence can sweep us away; the sword of war, the fury of a multitude, or the malignity of persecuting tyrants, cannot reach us. We are safe, and ought to be confident, though an host of men encamp against us: for “the Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.” “All things are ours, if we be Christ’s:” we need not fear, though the earth be removed. Death is our gain: and this single effect of godliness infinitely exceeds in value the ideal philosopher’s stone, the power of changing inferior metals into gold. Even “the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men,” will be the season of the believer’s complete redemption, to which he may now look forward with joyful hope. “O Lord God of Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.”

But riches are valued as the materials of future enjoyment.—“Soul, thou hast goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be

“merry: but God said, thou fool, this night
 “shall thy soul be required of thee’.” Our present life is short and uncertain; “Man goeth to
 “his long home.” On our journey we only want
 enough to bear our expences: yet many a traveller
 groans, through a great part of the road, under
 the weight of an useless burden, which he
 must leave behind him on the shore, when he embarks
 for his eternal residence!—If riches yield little
 additional enjoyment during youth and health,
 they will fail still more in old age. Then the
 relish for every pleasure becomes languid, desire
 fails, the organs of sensation wear out; but the
 passions retain their impotent dominion, unless
 subdued by divine grace. “Can thy servant taste
 “what I eat, or drink? Can I hear any more the
 “voice of singing men or singing women?” The
 aged sinner resembles the sapless trunk of an old
 tree; when the branches are lopped off or withered.
 He clings to a joyless life from dread of death:
 yet the thought, that he must soon die, will intrude,
 and interrupt his expiring comforts. He becomes
 a burden to himself, and often to others: and the
 greater his wealth is, the more reason has he to
 suspect, that many wait for his death with concealed
 impatience.

Alas, and is this all!—The sanguine youth, the
 active man of business, looked forward, in scenes

¹ Luke, xii. 16—21.

² 2 Sam. xix. 35.

of peril and fatigue, with the cheering expectation of affluence or preferment; and of tranquil enjoyment in declining life, as the reward of intense application. But how great is the disappointment even of the successful! Most of the candidates terminate their course, before the expected season of repose, or languish out their lives in pain and sickness: the highest prize in this poor lottery has been described; while an eternal state is unprovided for! “Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities!” saith the preacher, all is vanity.

“But the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.” The consistent Christian will not greatly regret the loss of pleasures which he has long comparatively despised: for he has resources in communion with God and the consolations of the Holy Spirit. Even if poor in this world, he commonly engages the cordial affection of some valued friends, whose society and attention solace the eve of life. Bodily pains and the loss of relatives are rendered tolerable, by faith and humble resignation: while the near approach of death and the prospect of heavenly joys reconcile his mind to transient sorrows and separations. Past experience of the Lord’s faithfulness and mercy inspires gratitude and confidence; which are rather increased than impaired by the consciousness of his own unworthiness.—“His outward man decayeth; but the inward man is renewed day by day.” Consolation often

abounds when flesh and heart are failing. Thus he meets death with composure, and then enters on that "fulness of joy, which is at the Lord's "right hand for evermore." And is not godliness with contentment great gain?

When the lovers of this present world are silenced; in respect of these reasons for desiring increasing wealth; they excuse their conduct by pleading their families: and doubtless we ought to endeavour, that our children may be provided for, and enabled to maintain themselves, when we shall be taken from them.—But the desire of advancing them, much above our own station in the community, is injurious to them, both in respect to their temporal comfort; their character for prudence and good behaviour, and the interests of their immortal souls. How can any one greatly labour to enrich his children, if he do not himself idolize riches? How can he vindicate such an attempt, who believes the words of Christ; "It is "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God?" But a pious education, an edifying example, many fervent prayers offered by religious parents for their children and with them, and the little spared from superfluous expences to relieve the indigent, constitute a treasure of superior value: while habits of industry and frugality, the result of right principles, will, by the blessing of God, be far more advantageous, than ungodly

riches, inherited with the encumbrance of the crimes with which they have been acquired.

Neither can wealth enable a man to be useful to his friends and relatives, in any way or degree, that may be compared to the advantages derived from godliness. To be capable of conversing in a pious and prudent manner with our acquaintance, of exhibiting religion before them in an amiable example, of recommending them to the Lord in our daily supplications, and of using divers means to render them wise unto salvation; when accompanied with uniform endeavours to serve them in their temporal concerns, will render us far greater blessings to them, than superior affluence could do.—And though men flatter themselves with the imagination, that they should do much good, when they are grown rich: yet supposing the best, which rarely happens; the most liberal use of ungodly wealth, seldom compensates the effect of corrupt principles and a bad example thus varnished over.—On the other hand, the godly man, however poor, is a light in his neighbourhood and the salt of the earth. He restrains the vicious, encourages the drooping, promotes piety and righteousness, professes and adorns the gospel, and in all respects is a blessing to every village, city, or nation in which he resides.—The Lord preserved all who sailed with Paul in answer to his prayers: ten righteous persons would have preserved Sodom: and the scripture fully warrants me to say, that

our national preservation hitherto is vouchsafed in answer to the prayers, and for the sake, of the pious remnant among us.—In all respects and in every view, “godliness with contentment is great gain,” yea the greatest of gains; “It is profitable for all things; having the promise of this life and of that which is to come.”

III. Let us then conclude with some practical instructions.

Many young persons, being brought in the way of religion, think that godliness may be very proper in old age; as at that time of life people have little to do, and have no relish for juvenile pleasures. They perhaps allow that it will sometimes be needful *for them* also: but they wish to defer the distasteful task to a more convenient opportunity. In the mean while, they purpose making a trial of the world; being determined not to believe that all is vanity and vexation, unless convinced by experience. The opinion, therefore, that religion is irksome and joyless, proves in this case a most fatal delusion of Satan. All desire *present* satisfaction; and few are willing to forego it for a distant and invisible felicity. Hence arises a procrastination that generally proves fatal. But could we convince men that genuine piety would best promote their present satisfaction; one great obstruction to the gospel would be removed. You,

my young friends, have doubtless found already, that disappointment and disgust often succeed to sanguine expectation: be persuaded therefore, we earnestly intreat you, to regard those, who have dearly bought their experience, when they declare, that this will more and more be the case, as long as you seek that happiness in the world, which can only be found in God and religion. "Come" then, "taste and see, how gracious the Lord is; "and how blessed they are that trust in him." Make a fair trial, whether peace of conscience and joy in God, be not preferable to turbulent mirth, with an aching heart and bitter remorse.

But are not religious people often melancholy and uncomfortable?—No doubt many who speak about religion, and live at open war with their convictions, are very miserable. Others, taking up distorted views of truth, and prematurely or disproportionately studying matters too deep for them, disquiet their minds and cast a gloom over their piety: while negligence, unwatchfulness, evil tempers, or cleaving to worldly objects, will render those uneasy, who fear God or have any tenderness of conscience. But these effects arise not from godliness, but from the want of it; and they would vanish, were the scriptures more implicitly believed and obeyed. We ought therefore to infer from these things, that we should carefully compare our religion with the word of God; and pray without ceasing, that we may be enabled to have our conversation as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

Perhaps some of you, who have neglected godliness, meet with continual disappointment in your worldly pursuits. Does not the Lord then say to you, "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?—Hearken diligently unto me—hear and your soul shall live?"—Few of the numerous candidates for wealth, honour, or power, are successful: and the most assiduous application has only the probability of success: but the un-failing word of God ensures the blessing to all, that seek his kingdom and righteousness in *the first place*, and in the way which he hath prescribed.

Are any of you who trust that you possess godliness, oppressed by poverty, sickness, or trouble? Seek after contentment, my brethren: seek divine peace and consolations with redoubled earnestness; and strive to serve God cheerfully in the humble duties of your station. Watch against envy and covetousness, and a repining disposition. Learn to pity such as have wealth without godliness, and to pray for them: and be very cautious what measures you adopt to mend your outward circumstances: for "they that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition,"—or "pierce them through with many sorrows¹."

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

Finally, let the rich remember, that they are only stewards, and entrusted with wealth for the benefit of others. Let me charge you then, my brethren of superior degree, that you “trust not “in uncertain riches, but in the living God.” That you be “rich in good works, ready to distribute, “and glad to communicate: that you do good to “all men, especially to the household of faith.”—Fear above all things having your portion in this life: and remember, that of all your possessions, nothing is *your own*, but “godliness with contentment,” and such “things as accompany “salvation.” All else will soon be left behind. Happy then are they and they only, who have “chosen the good part that shall never be taken “from them.

SERMON XI.

REVELATION, iii. 15, 16.

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot: so then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth,

THIS chapter, and that which precedes it, contain a message from our blessed Saviour to each of the seven churches in Asia; which in one part or another, suit the state and character of all Christian churches in every age and nation. It is therefore added at the close of each epistle, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

The message to the Laodiceans differs materially from all the rest; for the professed Christians in that city had degenerated far more than any of the others. They were become lukewarm, yet proud of their imagined proficiency; and the

reproofs, warnings, and counsels of our Lord were adapted to this peculiarity of character and conduct.

We know that lukewarm water is exceedingly disagreeable: the stomach recoils at it, and we spit it out with loathing. Thus Christ declared that he would cast off the church of Laodicea with disdain and abhorrence. There might, however, be some individuals of a better character, though probably infected with the same disease; and others might be brought to repentance. For the sake of these, therefore, the message was sent: they were warned, rebuked, counselled, and encouraged; and we may hope that many derived special benefit. Yet the church at large seems to have degenerated more and more: so that, while those churches, which our Lord mentioned with approbation, continue in some poor remains to this very day: there has not for a long time been a single professed Christian at Laodicea! At present I purpose,

- I. To describe the nature and symptoms of lukewarmness.
- II. To explain the grounds of that decided abhorrence of it, which Christ expresses.
- III. To add something by way of solemn warning and particular application.

I. We will consider the nature and symptoms of lukewarmness, both in collective bodies, and individuals professing Christianity.

It may here be proper to premise one observation, to prevent mistakes. When our advantages, opportunities, and obligations are duly considered; we may all be justly charged with comparative lukewarmness; and the more we become acquainted with ourselves, and experience the power of divine truth upon our hearts; the keener will be our sensibility, and the deeper our abasement on this account. But this case is totally distinct from that of the allowed and self-sufficient lukewarmness of the Laodiceans.

The disease of which we speak is only found where some profession of religion is made. The irreligious world is not lukewarm. Persons of this character may say, 'We make no pretensions to piety or sanctity; we seldom think about religion; it is a subject that never gives us any concern. Then indeed you are not chargeable with *lukewarmness*: you are clear of that crime: but if you pretend to no religion, what do you pretend to? Do you profess yourselves children of disobedience and of wrath, and heirs of hell? Is this your meaning, your character, your expectation? For whatever you may suppose, these things alone belong to those, who avow that they disregard God and religion,

But leaving such men to their own reflections ; we observe that lukewarmness pre-supposes the form and appearance of a church ; and that, possibly, neither very erroneous in doctrine nor corrupt in morals. In like manner the lukewarm professed Christian may retain the form of sound doctrine, avoid gross vices, and continue in communion with some religious society : he may even manage so well, that no specifick charge can be substantiated against him ; no foul spot be visible in his character ; no proof brought that he has renounced his profession. He may observe in some measure all the forms of godliness : but he wants the spirit, life, and activity of religion.— We cannot say that he is dead : yet he resembles a deeply wounded man, for whom great fears are entertained, even while symptoms of life seem discernible.

Ministers, who are conversant with the state of their flocks, generally class people according to their apparent characters, in their private judgment of them. Some are evidently in the broad way ; others are thought more promising, at least they desire to be so esteemed. But among some favorable tokens, many things appear very exceptionable : we would hope the best ; but “ What meaneth this bleating of the sheep and lowing of the oxen that we hear ? ” Something criminal or suspicious is observable in the shop or in the family : some duty is evidently neglected, or

slightly performed ; and this damps our fond expectations concerning them. Others are not wholly irreligious, nor is there any remarkable blemish in their conduct : but they are neither cold nor hot : they do not appear serious, active, or zealous ! and therefore we grieve over them, and stand in doubt as to the event of their profession. But there are some of another description ; who are “ our hope, and joy, and crown of rejoicing : ” may God exceedingly increase the number of them ! These are the ornament and credit of the gospel ; from them the light shines with efficacious splendour : and their bright example, with the energy of their influence and fruitfulness, counteracts the pernicious tendency of loose profession to wound the interests of truth, and retard its progress.

But let us enumerate some particulars, in which lukewarmness especially discovers itself. This may be observed, in the conduct of persons professing attachment to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel in respect of the ordinances of publick worship, and all the means of grace. The lively Christian says, “ I was glad when they said unto me, let us go in-
“ to the house of the Lord.” “ O God, thou art
“ my God, early will I seek thee : my soul thirst-
“ eth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry
“ and thirsty land where no water is ; to see thy
“ power and glory, as I have seen thee in the sanc-
“ tuary : because thy loving kindness is better

“ than life, my lips shall praise thee.” Hence you see him anticipating the opportunity of waiting upon God, as a man expects any season of pleasure and delight ; and making preparation lest any thing should deprive him of the satisfaction he expects. He suffers not a trivial hindrance to prevent his attendance on religious duties ; and if he cannot break through intervening obstructions, he finds it difficult to bring his mind into a due resignation to the divine will. He does not enquire how often he is *bound* to attend the house of God : but rather rejoices when an opportunity offers on any day, which he can embrace consistently with other duties.

On the contrary, the lukewarm come reluctantly to the ordinances of divine worship ; and are secretly pleased, when an excuse, deemed sufficient, is suggested for absenting themselves. A visit or an invitation from a friend, some trivial business, a slight indisposition, or the inconvenience of unfavourable weather, are no unwelcome hindrances to their attendance at the house of God. The same also is observable in respect of the Lord's supper, in which the lively Christian delights to commemorate the Redeemer's love, unless his mind has entertained some misconception about it. But such frivolous excuses as keep the lukewarm from publick worship, operate still more effectually, in leading him to absent himself from the Lord's table : unless it be a convenient part of that form,

by which he maintains his credit and quiets his conscience; for in other respects he regards it as a matter of indifference.

We may further observe, that lukewarm persons commonly consider the sermon as the principal object, and think little of joining with reverence and fervency in other parts of divine service.—They commonly therefore come late to the places of worship, and disturb the devotions of such as are more zealous. They are also ready to say to ministers, “Speak to us smooth things,” ‘Discourse on soothing and consolatory topicks; avoid awful and distinguishing subjects, and do not offend the audience with plain dealing.’—Such persons are peculiarly attentive to the manner, the voice, and delivery of the preacher: if these be graceful and suited to their taste, they are more easily satisfied in other respects. Above all they recommend brevity, ‘Let the sermon be short, the prayer short, and make haste to dismiss us.’ For they are soon weary of an employment, so little congenial to their prevailing disposition. They attend from custom, or amusement, or to pacify conscience; they delight not in the sacred service, and are reluctant to be “detained before the LORD¹.”

But if this be the case as to publick worship, what can be expected in respect to family-religion? If

¹ 1 Sam. xxi. 7.

this be not totally neglected, it is very superficially and irregularly conducted. Business, engagements, amusements; or visitants, easily induce the lukewarm to omit it entirely; or it is hurried over at an unseasonable hour, when perhaps several of the family are half asleep. Thus the souls of children and domesticks are neglected: and every person of discernment and observation must be convinced, that, according to all human probability, the religion of such persons whatever it be, will die with them. Indeed the families of the lukewarm have few advantages above those of the irreligious: while they are led to believe, that an evangelical creed will suffice to bring a wordly man to heavenly felicity,

Some of the old divines have observed, that 'apostacy begins in the closet:' and the same may certainly be said concerning lukewarmness: for even when our hearts are truly engaged in religion, we find it difficult to maintain habitual fervour and devotion in secret duties. It is therefore obvious to conclude, that they who are cold and formal in publick and family-worship, must be still more remiss in private. This, however, falls not under observation, but the lukewarm cannot but be conscious of it. Indeed the grand difficulty of the Christian's course consists in duly attending to self-examination, meditation, and secret devotion. Our sharpest conflicts with Satan and our own hearts will generally be about these duties. While

all goes well with us in this respect, we shall be carried through trials and services with comfort and advantage; but when we grow negligent in secret, our publick conduct will after a time be less respectable and edifying. This is, as it were, the pulse of the soul, by which we may best judge whether it be healthy or otherwise. So that the difference between a lukewarm and a zealous Christian must here be peculiarly observable to a man's own conscience.

The two characters may also be discriminated by the company which they prefer. Business or incidental circumstances may carry the most zealous believer into the society of worldly men; but he goes among them from a sense of duty; he is out of his element and bears a cross all the while; and he feels a quick sensibility and a watchful jealousy, lest he should disgrace his profession, or sustain detriment from so incongenial an association. When the necessity ceases, he consequently returns to the society of pious persons; and he habitually says with David, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and keep thy precepts."—But the lukewarm finds numerous pretences for visiting and loitering among ungodly associates, and for joining in some of their vain amusements. Their profane conversation or frivolous behaviour do not render him very uneasy: and it happens unfortunately that he has some objection against every

one of his acquaintance, who is strictly religious. —This man, though pious, is uncourtly or unpleasant in his demeanour; the other, on a certain occasion, said an impertinent thing; and the third hath given just cause of offence. Thus men of this character excuse themselves to their own consciences, as well as to others, while they separate from the company of religious people: and consequently they more and more approximate to the spirit and maxims of their chosen companions. They yield to solicitation in one instance, and then say, ‘What harm in this?’ They go a little further, and urge the same excuse. They plead for conformity to the world in one thing after another, till almost every trace of distinction vanishes; and then regard it as a mark of a liberal mind to maintain no singularities, and not to thwart the humour of the company: till at length they often come within the immediate attraction of the whirlpool, and are swallowed up beyond recovery!

The lukewarm professor reverses likewise the maxims of the gospel, in the pursuit and use of worldly things. He *first* seeks prosperity or indulgence; and vainly hopes that “the kingdom of God and his righteousness” will be added to him, without any peculiar concern or exertion. If he can maintain a hope that he is *safe*; he has no regard for the honour of God, the interests of the

gospel, the salvation of souls, or advancement in holiness. In order to maintain his confidence, he looks perhaps to some past experience of the power, which divine truth had on his heart and conscience: this he concluded at the time to be conversion, and he still endeavours to satisfy himself in the same manner; abusing some important doctrines of the gospel to support his hope, notwithstanding his present conduct. If spoken to on this subject, he feels, and probably expresses, great displeasure; but in other respects he is destitute of sensibility.—But the zealous Christian is very suspicious of himself, and bears patiently to have the ground of his confidence investigated. He is ready to say on such occasions, ‘Have I not said or done something, which counteracts my earnest desire to glorify God my Saviour, and recommend his gospel to my fellow sinners? Have I not been betrayed into evil tempers or inexpedient indulgences, which may give others an unfavourable opinion of my religious principles? Have I not mis-spent my time, and neglected to improve my talents? Have I avoided the appearance of evil, and taken care that my good should not be evil spoken of?’ These are constant subjects of self-examination and sources of humiliation to the zealous Christian, of which the lukewarm know scarcely any thing: for they seldom think of our Lord’s words, “Herein is my

“Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”

It might be supposed that persons, so deficient as to the grand essentials of Christianity, could not enjoy much comfort in religion; yet they frequently exhibit the appearance of high assurance and abundant consolations: for every good thing may be counterfeited. There are ways, by which men may conceal their lukewarmness even from themselves; and acquire a kind of intoxicating self-complacency. A man may be very zealous for some appendages of religion, while extremely languid about religion itself. He may contend earnestly for certain doctrines, or for some peculiarities of discipline and church-government; and defend his sentiments with great ability and fervour. His boasting, reviling, and bitterness, are indeed additional proofs that he is little acquainted with genuine christianity: yet the ardent zeal which he feels and expresses, in the cause of truth, as he supposes, enables him to conceal his real character from himself.

There are, however, some who deceive themselves in an opposite manner. They call their lukewarmness *candour*: they contend for no doctrine or peculiarity, and this is *moderation* in their use of the word. Every sentiment is with them a matter of indifference: they allow every man without disturbance to hold his own opinion; hoping that all, or most of them, will be found right at the last; this

they call *charity*, the principal grace of Christianity!—But in fact such men do not value the truth: and they impose on themselves by fair pretexts: while they prefer ease, credit, and interest to the glory of God and the cause of the gospel. The spirit of persecution is, in these lands, exceedingly abated, for which we have reason to bless God: but it may be questioned, whether this affected and idolized indifference about divine truth be not an evil of almost equal enormity. This fashionable way of thinking dignifies *lukewarmness* with the name of *candour*, secures it from censure, and teaches a man to be a Christian without offending the bitterest enemies of Christianity! But are not such men ashamed of Christ and his words, in this corrupt and evil generation? And will not he be ashamed of them, when he shall come in glory to judge the quick and dead?

Rashness and imprudence are often manifested, in contending for the truth once delivered to the saints: but shall we on this account be silent and satisfied, when Christianity or its leading doctrines is denied and vilified? Is there no profession of the name and doctrine of Christ required from his disciples? Are the peculiar instructions of revelation become matters of no consequence with professed believers?—When, however these questions are answered, it may further be remarked, that these very *candid* men forget their placid moderation among zealous Christians; and frequently

become warm, if not disdainful and bitter disputers, against evangelical principles!

I shall only add one more peculiarity of the luke-warm professor of the gospel; for the subject is almost inexhaustible. He is commonly distinguished by a proportionable measure of spiritual pride. Confident of his superior wisdom and attainments, he arrogates to himself, in almost every respect, the pre-eminence among his brethren. The apostle pointed out this symptom of the disease to the Corinthians, when he said, "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us.—We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised!" Yet while they were thus puffed up, their glorying was not good; and the doctrinal and practical errors and evils, which had been sanctioned among them, were almost incredibly many and dreadful! The church at Laodicea also said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knew not that she was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" which is the exact description of spiritual pride. So that this is one invariable symptom of lukewarmness, as well as a cause of its prevalence: for a high opinion

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 7—10.

of our attainments uniformly leads to something mean and grovelling, and “a haughty spirit goes before a fall.”

II. Then we proceed to explain the reasons, for which our Lord expressed such marked abhorrence of lukewarmness.

When he said, “I would thou wert cold or hot; so then because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth,” we cannot suppose he meant that such professed christians were always more wicked, or in greater danger of perdition, than apostates or notorious profligates: though considering their advantages, obligations, and ingratitude, they may be often in fact more heinously criminal. I apprehend, however, that our Lord especially referred to the dishonour done by the lukewarm to his name, and the mischievous consequences of their infectious and disgraceful example.—Every one knows, that a bad servant may do ten times more mischief, while he remains in the family, than he could do, were he dismissed from it: and in like manner lukewarm professors do far more harm to the cause of Christ, by pretending to religion, than they could do by openly renouncing Christianity. One Achan in the camp caused more trouble and loss to Israel, than all the hosts of the Canaanites; “Neither” says the Lord, “will I be with you any

“more; except ye destroy the accursed thing
“from among you.”

Corrupt professors of Christianity have in all ages been the grand obstruction to its progress.—Mr. Brainerd, in the narrative of his mission among the Indians, observes that he had great difficulty for a long time, to erase from their minds a suspicion, that he had formed some design of injuring them under a pretence of preaching the gospel: so frequently had they been defrauded by nominal Christians! This is the case, in one way or other, all over the globe: and the principal impediment to the success of the gospel in this land arises from the same cause. Lukewarm professors give irreligious people an unfavourable idea of evangelical doctrines. The prejudice against them is indeed naturally very strong, and men imagine they tend to licentiousness: but were there no loose characters among those that contend for these principles; were they all “a peculiar people, zealous of good works;” this objection would soon be silenced, and men would be ashamed of thus calumniating their conscientious neighbours.—It is likewise well known, that we profess to experience joy and peace in believing; to find the ways of religion pleasant and delightful; and to choose rather to be “door-keepers in the house of the

¹ Josh. vii.

“ Lord, than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness.” ‘ All this,’ say worldly people, ‘ sounds very well; yet these devout believers frequently come to borrow a little of our pleasure, and seem as intent as we are, in securing a portion of our good things.’ How can such men be convinced that there is superior excellency or satisfaction in religion; while they see us cleaving to the world, and reluctant to renounce what we affect to despise?

The lukewarm are also the bane of those, who have been newly impressed with a sense of divine things. Under the preaching of the gospel, thoughtless sinners are awakened to a concern about their eternal interests; their consciences become uneasy, and their minds attentive to instruction: they are convinced that many doctrines which once they disregarded are true and important, and perceive the necessity of renouncing sinful pursuits, and of separating from their old associates; and they become diligent in attending on the means of grace. But, if in this hopeful frame of mind, they come in the way of lukewarm persons, whose strong attachment to certain truths, and plausible address beguile their unexperienced hearts; they are easily seduced into false notions of *liberty*, not “in keeping God’s commandments,” but in disregarding them and they gradually lose their tenderness of conscience, and diligence in “labouring for the meat

“that endureth unto everlasting life.” They are now taught, that strictness in duty and self-denial deduct from the freeness of divine grace: and various insinuations of this kind poison their minds with prejudices against the ministers and Christians, among whom they were first excited to enquire after salvation. Thus numbers, who apparently set out well, by means of an unsuspecting attention to persons of this description, obtain a false peace, and finally settle among formal, disputatious, or antinomian professors. These are “the little foxes that spoil the vines” just when the tender grapes begin to be formed; and thus give most poignant grief to faithful pastors, while they witness, but cannot prevent, the perversion of those, who they hoped would be their rejoicing in the day of Christ.

But indeed the preachers of the gospel are themselves more exposed to temptation from the lukewarm, than from all other men whatever. We have like passions with our neighbours: and when we have forfeited the friendship of the world by adhering to the truths of the gospel; we are reluctant to meet also the frowns of religious people. Yet unless we stand firm against the insinuations of Laodicean professors, and venture their keen reproaches and calumnies, we shall not deliver more than half our message; we shall separate the practice from the doctrines of Christianity;

and pass over, in general and inoffensive terms, those very subjects, which the state of our congregations require to be most fully and plainly enforced. And as lukewarmness commonly prevails more among the wealthy than the poor, our danger is very great: for their favour is both agreeable and advantageous, and their disapprobation exposes us to serious inconveniences, and often threatens great distress. Thus ministers lie under strong temptations to “shun declaring the whole counsel of God,” to “keep back some things profitable to the people,” to speak softly and timidly, to call this prudence and candour; and perhaps to join in censuring such as are more faithful to God and the souls of men. Either such cases are not unfrequent in this metropolis, or I greatly mistake the meaning of the scriptures, and that of the words and actions of mankind. We should, however, seriously consider the apostle’s words, “If I were a man-pleaser, I should “no longer be the servant of Jesus Christ.”

In these and many other ways the lukewarm disgrace the gospel and retard its progress: they weaken the hands, disconcert the measures, and even ruin the simplicity of the ministers of Christ; while they damp the ardour, or mislead the earnestness, of real Christians. Can we therefore, any longer wonder at our Lord’s decided language against such pernicious characters? Let us then,

III. Apply the subject, in solemn warnings and particular exhortations.

Our blessed Saviour seems to address himself to the Laodicean church, to the following effect. 'Thy lukewarm spirit and conduct are so contrary to the design of my religion, and the obligations conferred on my disciples; so dishonourable to my name, and so injurious to mankind; that I am determined to give an awful lesson to all other churches, by casting thee off with contempt and abhorrence: I will therefore deprive thee of all thy abused privileges, and no longer leave thee the name or form of my holy religion.' In like manner, my friends, whenever any kingdom, city, church, or congregation becomes like the Laodiceans: it will surely and speedily be deprived of its religious advantages, the candlestick will be removed out of its place; and this will be accompanied with other tokens of divine indignation. Thus interpreted, the words are indeed awfully prophetic: and when lukewarmness becomes general in any church, however distinguished or denominated, it is a certain prognostick of approaching judgments, either spiritual or temporal.

But the application to individuals is more immediately the province of the preacher. We do not indeed say, that every person, infected with this disease, is a hypocrite and will prove an apostate: but we affirm most constantly, *that the case is*

awfully dangerous. “ Let no man deceive you with “ vain words:” let none persuade you to consider this as a trifling matter. “ If any man be in “ Christ, he is a new creature, old things are “ passed away ; behold all things are become new.” He has not only adopted a new creed ; but he has received a new heart, and leads a new life : he “ is “ created in Christ Jesus unto good works.”— How then can it be possible for a man to know that he is in Christ, unless he be conscious of this change, and manifest it in his whole disposition and conduct ? Will any one say, he knows himself to be in a state of acceptance, because he has a strong impression that this is his privilege ; because texts of scripture were brought to his mind to assure him of it ; and because he has had many comfortable seasons under religious ordinances ? If this spirit and practice do not at all accord to that of the Christian, as described in the oracles of God, ought he not to conclude that “ Satan, “ transformed into an angel of light,” has deceived him : and that he builds upon the sand, by hearing the words of Christ, and not doing them ? And how can he know, but that the storms and floods of death and judgment will sweep away his baseless edifice, with most tremendous destruction ? They who call Christ, Lord, and do not the things that he says ; even if they perform many wonderful works in his name, and receive extraordinary gifts from him, will at the last day be

compelled to "depart as workers of iniquity:" and what will then become of their anti-scriptural confidence?

The tares and the wheat must grow together till the harvest; the wise and foolish virgins will form one company till the coming of the Bridegroom; and guests who have not the wedding-garment may remain unnoticed, till the King come to see them: but the final discrimination, with its eternal consequences, will be dreadful to those, who had a name to live, and yet were dead.

Supposing, however, a man's lukewarmness not fatal; yet the uncertainty and the apparent danger of his condition are sufficient to excite great alarm and distress. If he be saved it will be "as by fire:" and what a gloomy prospect, what terrors and remorse upon a death-bed, are before him? These are the only tokens for good, of which his case can admit: for, unshaken confidence at the hour of death, succeeding an evidently lukewarm profession, proves that a man is given over to a strong delusion. Remember then, and may the Lord impress it deeply on every heart! that consternation and anguish, when death approaches, form the brightest prospect of the lukewarm Christian. And is this the provision you are making for that awful crisis? Is this your intention when you yield to indolence, temptation, and the seduction of bad examples?

You may probably, my brethren, censure my

address as harsh and severe, but I hope you will observe, that it is far below the energy of reproof and warning, employed by the loving Saviour himself: yet he spake to those, among whom some persons seem to have had a few feeble sparks of grace, as fire covered and almost extinguished by the ashes.

But some perhaps continue to quiet their minds, by thinking that they make no pretensions to religion, and are not therefore concerned in the rebuke. Let me however demand of you, whether you have not been “baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost?” Have you then openly renounced your baptism, and abjured Christianity? Or do you expect to be called Christians? If you do, this implies a profession of religion, however unmeaning and hypocritical: and your indifference about these subjects proves you the most lukewarm of all that bear the name of Christ. And is this your confidence? or do you intend to plead this before the tribunal of your Judge? Would not such an excuse then prove before men and angels, that you had “crucified Christ afresh and put him to open shame?” and that you had “done despite to the Spirit of grace,” by a course of conduct diametrically opposite to the religion which you professed?

Should these solemn reflections excite any of you seriously to enquire, what you ought to do, the answer is obvious. Consider the salvation of

your souls as your grand concern: forego or postpone all other pursuits, rather than suffer them to retard your course in seeking an interest in the Saviour of sinners. Be diligent, earnest, and persevering in attendance on all the means of grace. Repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance: separate from the world with all its sensual pleasures and stupifying dissipations: and seek your present happiness, as well as future safety, in the favour and service of our gracious God and Father.

If you doubt whether all this be necessary, I appeal to the Law and to the Testimony. Search the scriptures: see whether they do not require us to give the Lord our hearts and devote ourselves entirely to him; and whether the language of Christ, concerning self-denial, renouncing the world, enduring the cross, labouring and striving to enter in at the strait gate, be not much stronger than any thing here stated. If any of you should not be able to reconcile these passages to your views of salvation by grace; be assured that your views are unscriptural; and beg of God to open your understanding, that you may more clearly discern the truth as it is in Jesus. But beware of indolence and partiality in reading the scriptures: do not select a few passages, and pass over the rest, as unsuitable to your system, or uninteresting to you; for this springs from *lukewarmness*, and tends to its rapid increase.

But are any of you convinced, that you have hitherto been infected with this Laodicean spirit, and almost ready to tremble for the consequences? Let me call your attention to the subsequent part of our Lord's address to such luke-warm professors. He condescends to say even to them, "I counsel thee to buy of me, gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent."

Think then frequently and intensely on eternity and its infinite importance: meditate seriously on the death of Christ; the design, manner, causes, and effects of it; the instructions conveyed and the obligations conferred, by that great event.—Pray earnestly for the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, which alone can prevent or cure lukewarmness, and maintain the life and power of godliness in the soul. Examine particularly every part of your disposition and conduct: be willing to know the whole of your case as it really is.—Withdraw from the company of the lukewarm, and associate with zealous christians: and never admit a doubt, but that the more fervent, diligent, and fruitful you become, the greater will be your peace and comfort in life and death, and the more abundant your gracious recompence in the realms of blessedness.

We have all of us, my brethren, considerable cause for humiliation in this matter ; and have need to redouble our diligence, in using all these means, that we may make progress, and grow in grace. But while the Lord says to all, “ Behold “ I stand at the door and knock ; if any man hear “ my voice, and open the door, I will come in to “ him, and will sup with him, and he with me : ” he adds for the encouragement of those, who are fighting the good fight of faith, perhaps with conscious feebleness and many fears, “ To him that “ overcometh will I give to sit down with me upon “ my throne : even as I also overcame, and am set “ down with my Father on his throne. He then “ that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith “ unto the churches.”

SERMON XII.

MATTHEW, v. 16.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

OUR blessed Lord just before his ascension into heaven, thus addressed his apostles: "All power
" is given unto me in heaven and in earth: Go ye
" therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in
" the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the
" holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things
" whatsoever I have commanded you^r." Hence we learn, that there is a measure of instruction which precedes an intelligent profession of the gospel, comprising the first principles of the doctrine of Christ: and that there is also a more particular and exact instruction, by which ministers should endeavour to form the judgment and

^r Matt. xxviii. 18—20.

direct the conduct of believers, in all the several parts of Christianity. This distinction ought to be carefully remembered; that we may not suppose, the practical exhortations given to believers supersede the necessity of regeneration, repentance, and faith in the Son of God, as numbers seem to think; nor yet deem it inconsistent with the purest evangelical views, to explain particularly, and inculcate most earnestly, the several parts of our duty to God and to our neighbour.

In the Sermon on the mount, our Lord first shews, in the several beatitudes, that happiness principally depends on the state of the heart: and then addressing the disciples, in the presence of the multitude, he said, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, where with shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men." Christians, as scattered over the earth, ought to communicate a purifying savour of piety and righteousness, and thus to prevent the increasing depravity of the human race: but graceless preachers and professors of the gospel are the vilest and most hopeless of men.—"Ye are," says Christ, "the light of the world; a city set upon an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house." True Christians, placed in different families, villages, streets, cities, and

nations, diffuse the light of divine truth, received from the Sun of righteousness, in their several circles. This also renders them conspicuous: their tempers, words, and actions will surely be observed and exactly scrutinized. Nor were they enlightened from above, in order to be immured in cloysters, or to retire into deserts, like lamps put under a bushel: but it is the Lord's will, that they should resemble candles placed on candlesticks in the midst of a room, to give light to every part of it. Therefore "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."—It may be proper for us,

I. To consider the persons, to whom this exhortation is especially addressed.

II. To examine more fully its import, And

III. To state the object, which we should aim at in complying with it.

I. The persons to whom the words are especially addressed.

Some expositors seem to confine the exhortation to the apostles, or to the ministers of the gospel, exclusively. But though the words are peculiarly proper and energetick in this application: yet, it

is evident that all Christians are, in their own circle and measure, "lights in the world;" and all who profess Christianity may be exhorted to act consistently with their avowed character. In other parts of scripture similar exhortations are addressed to believers in general. The evangelical prophet, viewing the church as a disconsolate female sitting in darkness upon the ground, thus encourages her, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold the darkness shall cover the earth; and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee: and the gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising¹." When the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ illuminates the church; then she arises from the dust, reflects the bright beams of the Sun of righteousness, and shines as a light to the gentiles. The gospel is sent "to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way of peace:" "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God:" and when these effects are produced, men "are made the children of light and of the day," and are exhorted to a consistent deportment². St. Paul addresses the Philippians

¹ Isa. lx. 1—3.

² Luke, i. 79. Acts, xxvi. 18. Eph. v. 8—14.

in words very similar to those of the text: “Do
 “all things without murmurings and disputings;
 “that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons
 “of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a
 “crooked and perverse nation, among whom
 “ye shine,” (or “shine ye,”) “as lights in the
 “world; holding forth the word of life, that I
 “may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have
 “not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.” And
 St. Peter uses language to the same effect; “Ye
 “are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an
 “holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should
 “shew forth the praises of him, who hath called
 “you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

But we need not multiply proofs in so plain a case. The apostles derived a primary splendour from Christ, the Light of the world; and their light shone before vast multitudes with peculiar lustre. The ordinary pastor diffuses the same light in his circle, and according to his measure: and the meanest Christian has his little influence and a few observers, among whom too his light may be made to shine. Even nominal Christians, being favoured with the light of truth, are inexcusable, in proportion to their advantages, in not receiving and communicating the inestimable benefit. For “this is the condemnation, that light
 “is come into the world, and men love darkness
 “rather than light, because their deeds are evil.”

¹ Phil. ii. 14. 16. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

This may suffice to shew, that we are all concerned in the exhortation: for in our favoured land, and our peculiar situation, we have every advantage, for aiming to “let our light shine before men:” and if we do not, “we have no cloke for our sin;” so that it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for us.

II. We will then examine more fully the import of the exhortation.

God hath made other men his instruments in communicating to us the light of the gospel; and we should desire and endeavour to impart the benefit to others also: though we may seem rather lamps in the street, or candles in the room, than luminaries in the firmament of heaven. The means to be used for this purpose may vary, according to our several employments, abilities, and relations in life: but we all ought to have the same habitual design of bringing our neighbours and friends to the knowledge of God and themselves; the holy law, and the gospel of salvation; the way of peace and the path of duty; and all other things which pertain to evangelical piety.

In order to accomplish this purpose, it is requisite that we make an explicit profession of our faith; that it may be understood what doctrines we believe, on what foundation our hopes

are builded, and what we think concerning the person and redemption of Christ. We ought to avow our expectations from him, and obligations to him; that it may be perceived, on what account we deem ourselves bound to love him more than our greatest secular interests, or our dearest earthly friends; and unreservedly to keep his commandments. This profession is absolutely necessary to evince the sincerity of our faith; “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.¹” And “Whosoever shall be ashamed of the Son of man, and of his words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also will He be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of the Father with the holy angels.²”

This profession is indispensably demanded of Christ's disciples, in order that they may “let their light shine before men,” and diffuse the knowledge of divine truth in the world; without yielding to the dread of shame, reproach, or the most cruel persecution. It is not indeed expedient, forwardly to declare our peculiar sentiments, in all places and companies, without some special reason, or favourable opening; but if regard to character, or other secular motives render men so reserved in this matter, that their neighbours, friends, and relations remain, in great measure, strangers to their religious principles; their since-

¹ Rom. x. 10.

² Mark, viii. 38.

ity may well be questioned: for this is a direct refusal to render to the Lord the glory due to his name, and to recommend his holy religion to mankind. And even if their conduct in some respects be suited to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour; the observers are left to ascribe it to other causes: and thus an opportunity is lost of evincing the excellent tendency of evangelical truth.

This profession of our faith should especially be made, by attending on the ordinances of God, according to the directions of his holy word: and this also forms an important method of “letting our light shine before men.” In the primitive times, when a Jew or gentile began to attend on the preaching of the gospel; and when, professing “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ,” he was admitted by baptism into the visible church; when he associated habitually with Christians, stately joined in their publick worship, and commemorated the love and sufferings of Christ at his table: he avowed himself the servant of the one, living, and true God, and the disciple of the only-begotten Son of God. This conduct would be fully understood by his former companions, and he might expect contempt, reproach, or persecution, as the consequence. We indeed live at a time, when most men in our land *choose* to be called Christians: and such a variety of discordant opinions are main-

tained by the professed disciples of Jesus, that the mere circumstance of attending publick worship is no explicit avowal of our peculiar religious sentiments. But it is known that in some places, the mystery of the Trinity, the perfections of God, the righteousness of his law and government, and the wisdom and sovereignty of his providence, are maintained. Connected with these doctrines, man's accountableness to his Creator and Governor, a future judgment and a state of eternal retributions; the fallen condition of the human race, the evil and desert of sin, the justice of God in the condemnation of sinners, and his free mercy in their salvation, are strenuously insisted on: and the person, redemption, and mediation of Emmanuel, Jesus the Son of God; regeneration and renewal unto holiness by the Spirit; repentance and fruits meet for repentance; justification by faith alone; love to the Saviour constraining to devoted obedience; and patient continuance in well-doing animated by the hope of eternal glory, are the principal topicks, to which the attention of the auditors is called. These things are evidently enlarged upon in some congregations, and not in others: and if a man be convinced that they are the doctrines of scripture, he ought seriously and statedly to attend at some place of worship, answering to this description; avowing that his conduct is the result of examination, conviction, and regard to the authority of God. In doing this,

not only hearing the sermons, but joining in every part of the service with reverent devotion, and associating with those who hold and adorn the same principles, he will make a very distinct and intelligible profession of his faith: and in bringing his family, and others whom he can influence, to attend on the same ordinances: he may “let his light shine before men,” and exhibit an edifying example to his neighbours. To render this the more impressive, he should not only appropriate the Lord’s day to this purpose; but embrace opportunities of attending on any day when it does not interfere with other duties: coming early, and shewing in his whole deportment, that he takes delight in the worship of God, and in hearing his word. Such a conduct tends exceedingly to draw men’s attention to the gospel, and to promote vital godliness in the world.

It may further be observed, that all these ends are more decidedly answered, when the believer, after mature deliberation, stably attends at the same place of worship, than when he wanders from one to another: for thus he sets an example of constancy in his attachment to the truths and ordinances of God; and he more effectually ensures the attendance of his family. Perhaps it may be added, that this conduct indicates a more healthful state of soul, and best promotes “growth in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Our light should also shine before men, by instructive and pious conversation. "The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom and his tongue talketh of judgment:" and it is remarkable, that the most opposite effects are ascribed to the tongue in the sacred scriptures. The psalmist calls it "his glory:" and Solomon declares, that "the mouth of a righteous man is a well of life;" "the tongue of the just is as choice silver;" that "the lips of the wise feed many;" and that "the tongue of the wise is health."

On the other hand, "The tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison:—it is a fire, a world of iniquity;—it setteth on fire the whole course of nature, and is set on fire of hell." The fact is indeed undeniable, that the gift of speech, when abused, is the grand instrument in the propagation of atheism, infidelity, impiety, blasphemy, heresy, licentiousness, discord, and every other evil, through private circles and large communities, all over the earth. Yet this same gift, under the influence of divine teaching and holy affections, is also principally instrumental in diffusing the light of the gospel among mankind: not only by public preaching; but by the private instructions of parents and masters, and by familiar conversation. The speech of prudent zealous Christians, being "seasoned with salt," being pure, pious, and affectionate, "ministers grace unto the hearers." It is

* Jam. iii.

therefore emphatically true, that “life and death
“are in the power of the tongue;” “for out of the
“abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” If
then we be the disciples of Christ, and partakers
of his grace, we shall, after his example, “from
“the good treasure of our hearts bring forth good
“things.” For even if we keep our mouth, as it
were with a bridle, from all corrupt discourse; but
do not embrace opportunities of profitable conver-
sation; we shall be found guilty of burying our
talent in the earth.

All indeed have not the gift of properly introduc-
ing religious topicks in mixed companies, where
they are too generally unwelcome, however pru-
dently and seasonably managed: but every man
has a little circle, in which he may speak with free-
dom on the great concerns of salvation. Most per-
sons have relatives, and many have families, among
whom they are peculiarly bound to communicate
the knowledge of the gospel. There are also seasons,
in which almost any one will endure the serious
and affectionate introduction of religious subjects;
especially in times of peculiar affliction, or when
death hath visited his house. In some companies a
man is, as it were by common consent, called to
take the lead in discourse, and may select his sub-
ject: and in most situations some opening will be
found for a serious remark, which may be after-
wards recollected, if it do not at the time intro-
duce further conversation. The event of such

reflections frequently give us reason to say, "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!" And upon careful examination it will be found, that far more good is done in this way, than is in general supposed.

An objection, however, will naturally arise in the mind of many, from the consideration of the aversion and contempt commonly expressed for this kind of conversation. But it is certain, that the rules, prescribed by the Lord himself to his people, could not be reduced to practice, without exciting the same disgust and reproach. Even the conduct of Christ must be involved in the same censure: for he hath set us an example of this duty; and also of the manner in which it ought to be performed. In fact, the opposition of men, who have no habitual seriousness in religion, rather recommends, than forms an objection to pious discourse: and surely we ought not to neglect any part of our duty from that "fear of man which bringeth a snare!" "Thus saith the Lord,—

"harken unto me, my people, who know righteousness, in whose heart is my law: fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings: for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them as wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation."

(They, who timidly and cautiously keep silence

Deut. vi. 6—9. xi. 18—21.

¹ Isaiah, li. 7, 8.

on these subjects, who leave men in ignorance and under delusion, even among their own acquaintance; and make no effort to enlighten them with saving truth, lest they should be censured and stigmatized with some reproachful name; must act in direct contradiction to this solemn admonition. Whereas a prudent and suitable attention to this duty forms one of the most efficacious means of diffusing the savour of truth and piety, in families and neighbourhoods; and of opening a door of usefulness to those who labour in the word and doctrines.

There are indeed many vain talkers, who disgrace the gospel; disregarding relative duties and every rule of propriety, by an ostentatious zeal and officious boldness in disputing about doctrines; while it is often too plain that the truth has little sanctifying effect upon their own hearts. It is therefore peculiarly incumbent upon us to ask wisdom of God, in order to a right performance of this duty; and to be very careful that our religious discourse be recommended by the ornament of a consistent behaviour in all other respects. This is especially the way to "let our light shine before men." Thus Peter, exhorting Christians to "have their conversation honest among the Gentiles: that whereas they spake against them as evil doers, they might by their good works, which they should behold, glorify God in the day of visitation," inculcates the duties of sub-

jects to their rulers; “for,” says he, “so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” He then states the duties of servants, even to severe and froward masters; adding, “for what glory is it,” (what proof of grace or recommendation of the gospel) “if when ye be buffeted for your faults ye take it patiently? But if when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God; for even hereunto ye were called.” Afterwards he exhorts “wives to be in subjection to their own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives.” And having mentioned some other subjects, he thus concludes the exhortation, “Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ’.”

In like manner, magistrates, masters, husbands, parents, children, and all others, have various relative duties to perform for the common benefit: and if they be known to profess the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, which are generally accused of tending to laxity of morals, their conduct will be severely and minutely scrutinized. But when believers study to understand and aim to practise the duties of their several relations, in all respects

² 1 Pet. ii. iii.

more exactly than before; when they habitually give up their own humour, interest, or indulgence, provided conscience be not concerned, to oblige and serve those that are most prejudiced and unkind; and when this conduct is adhered to with meek perseverance, notwithstanding discouragements and ungrateful returns: then the excellency of evangelical religion is exhibited in the clearest and most affecting light. In this manner we ought to “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”

A conscientious exactness, as to every part of our conduct in the ordinary transactions of life, is likewise indispensably necessary: that they may be conducted with the strictest integrity, veracity, sincerity, and punctuality. We ought to “let our moderation be known unto all men:” it should be evident, “that our conversation is without covetousness;” and nothing ambiguous or suspicious should be observable in any of our dealings. A harmless and inoffensive deportment also is peculiarly necessary: we ought to keep at a distance from intermeddling in other men’s affairs; from slander and discord; and from every word and action, which may prove injurious to the interest, peace, reputation, relative comfort, or ease of any other person; as far as this can be done consistently with other duties.

An evident disposition to kindness, benevolence, and compassion, is another ornament and recom-

mendation of the gospel. Nor is affluence, or extensive liberality, requisite in order to diffuse this benign light around us: provided our exertions bear some proportion to our ability. A loving spirit may be manifested in a narrow sphere, by a continual attention to little incidents; and by such beneficent actions, as are within the power of every man, whose heart is properly disposed.

These tempers ought to be associated with forbearance and gentleness under insults and injuries, a readiness to forgive repeated and most trying provocations, and persevering endeavours to “overcome evil with good.” And when the believer is also willing to acknowledge, without reserve, the mistakes and faults, into which he hath been betrayed; and to make suitable concessions and amends to all, whom he hath in any respect offended; “his light shines before men,” in a very resplendent manner. Patience and resignation also, in those trying circumstances, which excite others to peevishness and rebellious murmurs; cheerful contentment at a distance from those pleasures, which most men deem the solace of life; moderation and regard to expediency in the use of things lawful; indifference about distinctions, pre-eminence, or applause; and discretion in the management of secular affairs, contribute to recommend, and consequently to diffuse, the light of divine truth.—This is more especially the effect of a diligent improvement of our talents, according to our rank in life, or our situation in the

church; by employing wealth, authority, influence, genius, learning, and every endowment, with a steady aim to promote the cause of true religion in the world, and to render mankind wiser, holier, and happier, by every means we can devise.

By a combination of these dispositions, and an habitual regard to every part of our conduct, according to the brief hints here given; avoiding extremes, rashness, harshness, and affected singularity; endeavouring to unite a courteous obliging behaviour with religious constancy and fortitude; and studying the proprieties of our several stations, we may, I apprehend, comply with our Lord's exhortation, and "let our light shine before men."

III. Then, we proceed to consider the object, which we ought to propose to ourselves, in attending to these duties.

It hath been hinted, that our light should shine *before men*, and not at a distance from human society. They who quit the active scenes of life to which Providence has called them, that they may cultivate piety in privacy and retirement, too much resemble such soldiers, as decline the combat, and refuse to face danger or endure hardship in the service of their country. Some employments indeed are absolutely irreconcilable with

a good conscience : but when this is not the case : it is generally the believer's duty, to " abide in his " calling." Christianity suffices to teach every man, from the monarch to the slave, how to glorify God and serve his generation, by a diligent and self-denying performance of the duties belonging to his station. And this is the best method of exhibiting before men the nature and efficacy of that remedy, which God hath devised for the disorders of this evil world.

Our Lord, in this same sermon, warns his disciples not to do their " works to be seen of men : " yet here he requires them to " let their light so " shine before men, that they may see their good " works." Our actions, however good in themselves, are corrupt in their principle, if they spring from vain-glory, or are made known with ostentation, as if we sought human applause. But if we abound in the fruits of righteousness, and patiently continue in well doing, it will be impossible that our good works should be wholly concealed. Our Lord " went about doing good : " and he always shunned human observation, in his constant exercise of beneficence, as far as his circumstances would admit of it : yet his love and power were undeniable, and his fame spread abroad through the adjacent regions. Indeed almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, of which Christ spake afterwards, generally demand secrecy : but hypocrites especially seek glory by openly performing them :

while the habitual tenour of a sober, righteous, and godly life, must be visible to those among whom we reside. Yet even here we ought to watch against every degree of ostentation.—But there may be occasions, in which the honour of God and the edification of our brethren, may require us to make known even those parts of our conduct, which should in general be concealed. Thus Daniel opened his windows, and prayed three times a day, as a protest against the impious decree of Darius, or rather of his ministers; and the primitive Christians publickly sold their estates, to provide for the needy. And thus martyrs, in prison or at the stake, prayed singly in the most open manner, though at other times accustomed to retire into a closet.

The object which we are instructed to propose to ourselves, in making our light “shine before men,” is this, “that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven:” and our conduct may be regulated in most cases, by carefully examining how that end may be most effectually attained. But so far from our good works conducing *in any degree* to our justification before God, even the gracious recompence, promised to the fruits of the Spirit in the hearts and lives of believers, is not so much as mentioned in the passage before us. Higher and nobler motives are exclusively proposed, motives in which self-love is allowed no gratification, except we can

find pleasure in glorifying God and doing good to men.

The people of the world have in general a very unfavourable opinion of evangelical doctrines. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness;" and the plan of redemption seems to many of them irrational, inconsistent, and calculated to level all distinctions of character and capacity, and to militate against the interests of morality and science. They therefore commonly entertain a contempt for a man's understanding, when they discover that he has zealously embraced this religious system: and the disgusting conduct, or extravagant notions, of too many who profess these doctrines, confirm these fatal prejudices, and furnish them with anecdotes and objections, with which to oppose the truth.—But when a man soberly avows his belief of the gospel, and "is ready to give a reason of the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear:" when he discourses rationally on other subjects, and behaves with increasing propriety and consistency in all his various relations and engagements: the prejudices of observers gradually subside, and they begin to allow that his principles are not so intolerable as they once conceived them to be. Finding, that, while he decidedly resolves "to obey God rather than man," he also is ready to serve or oblige others, when he can do it with a good conscience; and that his conduct when most exactly scrutinized,

appears to the greatest advantage; and feeling perhaps that their own interest and comfort have been materially advanced by the change: they are prepared to receive more favourably any hint he may drop concerning the salvation of Christ; to read a book that he earnestly recommends, or to give the preachers of the gospel an occasional hearing. Thus many are led to an acquaintance with the truths of Christianity in the most attractive manner: their aversion and contempt are almost imperceptibly removed; and one after another is brought to the knowledge of Christ, and faith in his blood. Then a new light is set up to shine before men, that others may see his good works also, and be won over to join in glorifying our God and Father.

The Lord alone, it is true, can open the understanding and change the heart: but he almost always uses means and instruments; and the pious example and zealous endeavours of Christians, as well as the preaching of the gospel, are blessed to the conversion of sinners. Every believer therefore should habitually design and endeavour to be useful in this manner, within his proper sphere; and propose it to himself as the grand object of his future life, to which all other pursuits ought to be subordinated, and if possible rendered subservient. He should watch over his tempers, words, and actions; and endeavour to regulate them in such a manner, that they may give the utmost

energy to his attempts to recommend the gospel to his family and acquaintance. It should be his constant aim, to strengthen the hands of faithful ministers; and to shew in his own conduct, the reality, excellency, and beauty of pure religion, and its tendency to render men happy and useful.

When this is carefully and generally attended to, the number of real Christians will commonly be multiplied, the light of life will be more widely diffused; and the grain of mustard-seed will become a large plant.

We cannot reflect seriously on this subject, without lamenting, that there are but few Christians, even in nations professing Christianity.—The man, who hears an express command of Christ with contemptuous neglect, and habitually disobeys it, cannot reasonably expect to be thought his true disciple; yet, who can deny that immense multitudes of professed Christians do thus treat the exhortation contained in the text?—Let none then be offended with us, for distinguishing between true believers, and those who say to Christ, “Lord, Lord, but do not the things which he says:” for as he will shortly come, and make a complete and final separation; it is of the utmost consequence to every one, that he learn his real character and condition, before the door of mercy and hope be for ever shut against him.

Let each individual, therefore, seriously and impartially enquire, whether he have that inward

evidence of having believed and obeyed the gospel, which arises from a fervent desire that God may be glorified in the conversion of sinners, and from an uniform endeavour to "let his light shine before men," for that purpose. If this be wholly wanting, the most exact creed and the strictest form of godliness will prove entirely unavailing. The Judge, at his appearance will silence all such pleas, by saying with awful indignation, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." In proportion, as we are doubtful, whether this be indeed the ruling principle of our hearts and the plan of our lives; we should question whether our faith be living, and our hope warranted. We are, however, invited to come to Christ, as sinners for salvation: and if we really accept of this invitation, "giving diligence to make our calling and elections sure;" the subsequent change will constitute a "witness in ourselves," that we are partakers of Christ, and that his Spirit dwelleth in us.

Finally, my Christian brethren, we all need to be deeply humbled, that we have not "let our light shine before men," in that measure, and to that effect, which our peculiar advantages and obligations rendered incumbent on us. Let us then confess and lament our unfruitfulness: and while we humbly crave forgiveness of the past, let us earnestly beseech the Lord for a larger measure of his grace; that we may henceforth "walk more worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory."

SERMON XIII.

JAMES, i. 22—25.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

THE apostle James seems to have especially intended his epistle, as an antidote to the delusion of those, who abused the doctrines of grace; and who, expecting salvation by a dead faith, considered good works as altogether superfluous. This may account for the remarkable difference, between his language and that of St. Paul; who was chiefly employed in contending against such as ran into

the opposite extreme. Having therefore shown that temptations and sins must not be ascribed to God, the unchangeable Giver of every good and perfect gift; and observed that the word of truth is the grand mean of regenerating sinners, and rendering them willing to consecrate themselves unto God: he gives some directions concerning the manner, in which men hear and receive the divine message, that it may be “in them an engraft-
 “ed word, able to save their souls.” He then introduces the passage, which I have chosen for the subject of our present meditation, and concludes with these remarkable words; “If any man among
 “you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his
 “tongue, but deceiveth his own heart: this man’s
 “religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled
 “before God and the Father is this; to visit the
 “fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to
 “keep himself unspotted from the world.” The religion which God approves, when viewed apart from the principles whence it springs, and the ordinances through which it is produced and maintained, is chiefly manifested by self-denying kindness to men for the Lord’s sake, and separation from all the pollutions of this evil world. “Now,” says
 “St. Paul, “abideth faith, hope, and charity; but
 “the greatest of these is charity.”

The text viewed in this connexion, may give us an opportunity of considering,

I. The peculiar intent of revelation, and the purposes which it was evidently intended to answer.

II. The inefficacy of hearing without practising, to accomplish any of these purposes.

III. The nature, and sources of that fatal self-deception, into which numbers are in this respect betrayed.

IV. The contrast betwixt the mere hearer, and the practical student of scripture.

I. We consider the peculiar intent of revelation, and the purposes which it was evidently intended to answer.

“The Lord made all things for himself;” that in different ways they might manifest his glory. The inanimate creation, in every part, proclaims his wisdom, power, and goodness, and demonstrates his being and perfections.—“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work.” Each of the animal tribes answers the end of its creation, and enjoys all the felicity of which it is capable, except as involved in the consequences of our sins. But rational creatures should glorify their Maker in a higher manner; being formed capable of understanding

the display he hath given of himself in his works, and of rendering him the reasonable service of adoration and obedience; in which, as connected with the ineffable enjoyment of his love, their genuine felicity consists. Yet, without at all considering the difference observable in men's characters, it is undeniable, that all "have forsaken the Fountain " of living waters: and have hewn out for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no " water." This is the universal apostacy and idolatry of the human race: they are all "alienated " from the life of God." None seek their happiness in knowing, loving, obeying, and worshipping him; but all, if left to themselves, idolize the creatures, and expect felicity from the possession and enjoyment of them. It might easily be shewn that this is the prolifick source of all the vices and miseries of mankind, however varied and multiplied. The idolized objects of their several pursuits are unsuitable and insufficient for their happiness; moderate possession and use give not the expected satisfaction; and hence spring intemperance and licentiousness, with all their dire effects. The devotees of riches, power, fame, or pleasure become rivals, and interfere with each other; thus their malignant passions are excited, and they are tempted to the most destructive and atrocious crimes. The departure from God makes way likewise for rebellion, enmity to his perfections and government, and direct op-

position to his commands and cause: and hence spring impiety, infidelity, atheism, superstition, every species of false religion, and every form of virulent persecution.

Thus man hath forfeited his felicity in the favour of God, incurred his awful displeasure, lost his own capacity of enjoying a happiness adequate to his desires, and rendered himself the slave of the vilest affections. And, as happiness is in its own nature one and unchangeable; he could by no means have avoided the most dreadful miseries, during the whole of his existence, had not his offended God brought *life* and felicity, as well as immortality, to light by the gospel.

It is therefore the especial intent of revelation, to make the one living and true God known to his apostate creatures, in the mysteries and perfections of his nature, as far as necessary; in the righteousness of his law and government; and in his readiness to shew mercy and confer happiness even on rebellious man. It was evidently the design of the Lord to bring us back to himself; to provide for the pardon of our sins, and to give us a title to eternal life, in a way honourable to his perfections; to reduce us to a proper disposition of mind, that we might thankfully receive these blessings and make due returns for them; to effect a cordial reconciliation between himself, the great and glorious Creator, and us rebellious creatures; and to teach us to love,

reverence, worship, and obey him, that, being renewed to his holy image, we might enjoy true happiness for evermore in his favour and service.

Revelation was also intended to train up a people, who might be the instruments of God in promoting his cause among men; in alleviating and counteracting the miseries and mischiefs of the world; and in doing good to one another, till their removal to a state of perfect holiness and felicity. Finally it was designed to bring fallen men to that blessed state: that being made equal with the angels, they might for ever unite with them in the most sublime worship and delightful service of their infinitely glorious Benefactor.

Now if these are the special ends and purposes of revelation, as every impartial and diligent enquirer must be convinced they are; we may readily see,

II. The inefficacy of hearing without practising to accomplish any one of them.

But the importance of the subject is inexpressible, and demands a more particular investigation. The apostle supposes in the text, that the persons he addressed did hear the *word of truth*, and not false doctrine: for the more deeply men are impressed by erroneous sentiments, and the more entirely these become practical principles, the greater mischief is done; as such deluded persons are inflated with pride, buoyed up in self-confidence, and

encouraged in gratifying their corrupt passions even as a part of their religion. These are the produce of the tares, which the enemy sows in the field while the servants sleep: but the self-deceivers, that abound where the good seed is sown, are such hearers as receive the doctrine of truth into a carnal mind by a dead faith, and pervert it through the artifice of Satan and the deceitfulness of their own hearts.—Our present business therefore lies with those, who stately, or occasionally, attend on the real gospel of Christ.

It may here be proper to make a digression in order to mention some descriptions of *hearers only, and not doers*: that we may hold the mirror to every individual, and help him to discover what manner of man he is. Many persons form a part of our congregations, who come from habit or constraint. Children or domesticks belonging to religious families, and many others in different situations, are accustomed to attend divine service, where the word of truth is preached. They know this is expected from them: and they submit to it, as a stated tax on their inclinations, which they pay for the sake of *coincident* advantages. Such persons commonly forget, that *they* are addressed by the preacher, and concerned in his instructions. They come and go, as it were, mechanically; but scarcely think of complying with the exhortations, which are most earnestly enforced. They receive the seed by the way-side; and “the devil takes it

“away, lest they should believe and be saved.”— If this observation should reach the ears of any persons who answer to the description: let them remember, that for once at least *they* were particularly addressed; that the subject comes home to their case; and that not only the preacher, but the apostle speaks to them, as if by name, saying, “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

There are likewise *speculating* hearers, who study religion, as other men do mathematicks: either to gratify curiosity and love of discovery; or because they hope to render it subservient to worldly interest and reputation; or vainly imagine that a sound creed is the one thing needful, the sure and the only passport to heaven. These men are often very severe on blind Pharisees, who think to be saved by a *form of godliness*: but they cannot see that a *form of knowledge* is equally worthless, and far more dangerous; because it produces a more desperate kind of pride and self-preference, for “knowledge puffeth up.” They consider hearing, speculating, disputing, and criticizing preachers and doctrines, as the whole of religion. Inactive notions produce no change of character: even the apparent morality or piety, which is sometimes connected with them, results from other principles; while the spirit and conduct, in many respects, are diametrically opposite to the real tendency of the doctrines for which they contend. Such persons,

however, seldom persevere in stated attendance, where the *whole* truth is preached: and as the completion of their system is the main object with them; they often grow weary of hearing even that partial statement, which they approve, and which they have fully understood.

Another description of hearers mistake *the means of becoming religious for religion*. They hear several sermons every week, from their favourite preachers: though perhaps they scarcely understand, and never bestow any pains to remember and practise, what they hear. Sometimes, they ground their confidence on attending such ministers, as are noted for distinguishing faithfulness; and, as they manage to endure this plain-dealing, they suppose themselves approved; for they understand that many hypocrites are offended by it. But at the same time, they never seriously think of examining themselves by the doctrine, or of following the exhortations, thus repeatedly inculcated.

We must by no means omit to mention those hearers of the gospel, who seek *entertainment* in places of worship, when conscience remonstrates against other amusements.—These are *amateurs* of oratory, good language, and graceful delivery; they admire the flights of a fine and vigorous imagination: or perhaps they are pleased with close reasoning, or the discussions of an acute logician: though numbers of this class are as deficient in judgment, as in piety. They gratify themselves,

however, by hearing preachers, whose talents suit their taste, whatever that may be. This employment sometimes agreeably fills up a vacant hour which might otherwise be tedious: and they *endure* even the truth for the sake of the *manner* in which it is delivered! Such persons attended Ezekiel. “Lo thou art to them,” said the Lord to his prophet, “as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words but they do them not.”¹

The *captious* hearer likewise requires to be noticed. He comes on purpose to criticize and find fault; to try every one’s doctrine by his standard; to discover his own acuteness by detecting some error of the preacher; and to “make a man an offender for a word.” He seeks for nothing but the bran or the chaff, and these alone he carries away. He means not to *learn*, much less to practise: and he must therefore be a hearer only, and not a doer of the word.—I would not, however, have you to conclude, that we deem our auditors obliged to credit all we say, or precluded from the free exercise of their own judgment. Men may diligently compare our doctrine with the scriptures, and differ from us in many particulars; while they edify by every sermon, and are doers of the word: for they may examine with sobriety, humility, and candour; and differ with reluctance and earnest

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 30—34.

prayer to be directed aright. But the captious hearer resembles a man, who turns with disgust from a plentiful table, because he dislikes some one dish. Nay, he goes to the feast, not to eat, but to shew his delicate and fastidious taste by finding fault with the provisions !

Time would fail should we consider the *curious* hearer, who goes to find out what some celebrated preacher has got to say, perhaps that he may turn it into ridicule ; the *procrastinating* hearer, who intends to practise when he has a more convenient opportunity ; and many others, who might in like manner be arraigned and condemned.

It must, however, be obvious, that all such persons fall short of every purpose, for which the word of God was mercifully given. “ How do ye say, “ we are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us ? “ Lo, certainly in vain made he it, the pen of the “ scribes is in vain.” The word of truth continually calls them to consider their ways, and examine their hearts and lives ; that they may become acquainted with their state and character ; this they *hear* indeed ; but continue careless and inconsiderate ! They are warned to flee from the wrath to come ; but they flee not : and they are invited to come to Christ that their souls may live ; but they “ refuse him that speaketh.”— Wisdom thus expostulateth with them, “ How “ long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity, and

“scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate
 “knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: I will
 “pour out my Spirit unto you; I will make known
 “my words unto you:” but “they set at nought
 “all her counsel, and despise all her reproof.”—
 They are commanded to repent, and to cast away
 all their idols and transgressions: but they cleave
 to their sins, and “after their hardness and im-
 “penitent heart, treasure up wrath against the day
 “of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judg-
 “ment of God.” They are exhorted to pray with-
 out ceasing; but they seem to say, “What is the
 “Almighty that we should serve him? or what
 “profit shall we have if we pray unto him?” They
 pay no practical regard to Christ, while he com-
 mands them, to “labour for the meat which en-
 “dureth unto everlasting life;” “to strive to enter
 “in at the strait gate, to search the scriptures,
 “and to take his yoke upon them.” They
 hear indeed; and admire or object, as their notions
 are sanctioned or opposed; but if Christ be the
 Author of eternal salvation to those and those
 alone, who *obey him*; and if all they be his ene-
 mies, “who will not have him to reign over them;”
 such persons will as certainly perish, as any de-
 scription of sinners whatsoever. Nay, a partial
 obedience, which interferes not with their incli-
 nations or interests, does not warrant them to ex-
 pect a more favourable doom: “for he that keepeth

“the whole law and offendeth in one point is “guilty of all.” According to the law itself a man is condemned for a single transgression ; and according to the gospel, he who habitually commits one known sin, is adjudged a hypocrite and unbeliever. If this were not so, Herod might have retained Herodias ; nor would it be necessary for us to part with the right hand or the right eye which causes us to offend.

Whether we consider revelation as intended to reconcile us to God, to make known to us the way of peace, to be the means of our renewal to holiness, to prepare us for glorifying God on earth, to fit us for enjoying his love in heaven, or to teach us to do good among men and serve our generation : it is evident that hearing without practising fails entirely of accomplishing any one of these purposes. This is so obvious in itself, and so constantly inculcated in every part of scripture, that it would be almost incredible that any man should be deceived by so palpable a cheat, were it not most lamentably common : nor can this fact be accounted for, but by allowing that “the heart “is deceitful above all things, and desperately “wicked.”

III. Then we consider the nature and sources of that fatal self-deception, into which numbers are in this respect betrayed.

It is observable, that the apostle does not here warn us against the artifices of "Satan transformed into an angel of light," or those of "his ministers transformed into the ministers of righteousness." These indeed will never be wanting in subtle endeavours to beguile the souls of the simple: yet they can *fatally* deceive none, who are not disposed to deceive themselves.—It may also be remarked, that such persons seldom impose on other men. The ministers of Christ stand in doubt of them; nay, are often fully convinced of their awful delusion, and, with tears of affection, risk their displeasure by trying to undeceive them: but such endeavours are generally ascribed to harshness, prejudice, or calumny. They seldom deceive consistent Christians, as they may discover by the shyness and reserve of their conduct; while frankness and cordiality mark their social intercourse with more approved characters. Nay, the people of the world can commonly distinguish real pious and upright believers from mere speculating professors. Many of them court the society of such self-deceivers, while they fear meeting with persons of eminent sanctity: they can endure any creed, provided men's example sanction their spirit and conduct: "they are of the world, therefore the world loveth them," while it hates those whom Christ hath chosen out of the world. There are, however, men that make

no great pretensions to religion, who respect such as are consistently pious: yet they join with those, who honour them by their hatred, in heartily despising him who is a hearer of the word, and not a doer.

But let us consider some of the methods, by which such men deceive themselves. The sacred scriptures ascribe the salvation of sinners wholly to *grace*, or free unmerited mercy; and declare that none of our own righteousness has contributed, or can contribute, to procure the inestimable blessing: now, some general notions of this fundamental truth help numbers to deceive themselves. Not considering salvation in its extensive meaning, as comprising the whole of our reconciliation to God and recovery to holiness; but confining their thoughts merely to pardon and justification, they infer that good works must *in all respects* be excluded from our views of the gospel. It is indeed most true, that “we are justified freely
“by the grace of God, through the redemption
“that is in Christ Jesus:” but it is equally true, that the will and power to perform real good works is an essential part of our salvation. “By grace
“are ye saved, through faith; and that not of
“yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works,
“lest any man should boast. For we are his work-
“manship, created in Christ Jesus *unto good works*,
“which God hath before ordained, that we should

“ walk in them.”—“ The grace of God, which
 “ bringeth salvation, teaches us that denying un-
 “ godliness and worldly lusts, we should live so-
 “ berly, righteously, and godly, in this present
 “ world.”¹”

This is the uniform language of the new testa-
 ment; and it is most evidently rational: for the
 renewal of a fallen creature to holiness is as need-
 ful, important, and unmerited a favour, as pardon
 and the gift of righteousness by faith: but for
 want of attending to this, numbers take occasion
 from the doctrines of grace to deceive themselves.
 Indeed many use unscriptural expressions, which
 are extremely liable to misconstruction; and give
 a disproportionate statement of the truth: yet it
 must also be allowed, that the very words of scrip-
 ture may in this manner be perverted. Thus Peter
 observed, concerning the writings of his beloved
 brother Paul, that “ in them were some things hard
 “ to be understood, which they, that were un-
 “ learned and unstable, wrested, as they did the
 “ other scriptures, to their own destruction.”²”

The language of the sacred writers concerning
faith is likewise most decided: “ He that believeth
 “ and is baptized shall be saved; and he that be-
 “ lieveth not shall be damned.”—By faith alone,
 and by no other operation of the mind or action
 of the life, can the sinner be made partaker of the

Eph. ii. 8—10. Tit. ii. 11—14.

? Pet. iii. 16.

righteousness and redemption of Christ. But while numbers presumptuously use language diametrically opposite to that of holy writ; there are many who deceive themselves by a misapprehension of the scriptural doctrine. Various arguments have convinced them that certain opinions are true, and they dispute earnestly for them. Surely, say they, we *believe*; and if we believe, we have all things in Christ, “who of God is made to us, “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” Hence they conclude, that practice should only be insisted upon in general terms; and while secular motives restrain them from scandalous immoralities they imagine that all is well, and nothing further is required. But they do not duly consider the difference between dead and living faith: and that justifying faith works by love, purifies the heart, overcomes the world, and produces unreserved and zealous obedience. And while they give peculiar attention to St. Paul’s argument concerning justification by faith, they overlook the account he gives of the holy fruits produced by faith; especially in the conduct of Abraham and Moses, and other ancient believers, as stated in the eleventh chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews.

The word of God gives us abundant reason to expect, that the true believer’s experience will confirm and attest the sincerity of his faith. “He

“ that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself:” “ Having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance.” “ The day dawn and the day-star shall arise in your hearts.” The meaning of these scriptures, and many others to the same effect, is very important; and teaches us, that the real disciples of Christ experience such effects in their own souls, from believing the doctrines and relying on the promises of the gospel, as abundantly satisfy them, that the Lord is faithful to his word, and that he both comforts and sanctifies his people by the truth. But numbers deceive themselves by a counterfeit experience. They have been alarmed, have changed the ground of their confidence, have had their imaginations heated or delighted by impressions and visionary representations: they have recollected the promises of the gospel, as if spoken to *them* with peculiar appropriation, to certify them that their sins were forgiven: and having seen and heard such wonderful things, they think they must no more doubt their adoption into the family of God. They have also frequently heard all experience profanely ridiculed as enthusiasm: and this betrays them into the opposite extreme; so that they are emboldened to despise every caution, as the result of enmity to internal religion, and to act as if there

¹ Eph. i. 13. ² Pet. i. 19. ¹ John, v. 10.

were no delusive or counterfeit experience. But the event too plainly shews their awful mistake; and that they grounded their expectations upon the account given of the extraordinary operations of the Holy Spirit on the minds of prophets, rather than on the promises of his *renewing influences* in the hearts of believers. When therefore they lose the impressions with which they once were elated, they relapse nearly into their old course of life, their creed and confidence alone excepted. The seed of the word, which had sprung up, withers, because it hath no root: they are not doers, but hearers only, deceiving their ownselves.—But the seal of the Spirit, like that affixed to the melted wax, leaves an indelible impression; and the image of Christ will in some measure be discernible, in the temper and conduct of those who have received it, through all changes to the end of life.

We are but little acquainted with the real character and secret conduct of each other, except in the most intimate relations and connexions; especially in populous cities. We see men attend on publick ordinances, we hear from them, in occasional conversation, the language of believers, and we know nothing concerning them inconsistent with these appearances. It is our duty to love the brethren, and to speak comfortably to them. Charity hopeth all things, and thinketh no evil: we therefore behave to such men as brethren; and

this circumstance helps many to deceive themselves. The self-flattery of the human heart is inconceivable, and its effects prodigious: so that numbers put the candid opinion of ministers or christians, who scarcely know any thing of them, in counterpoise against the accusations of their own conscience, respecting the secret sins which they habitually commit. They even persuade themselves that allowed crimes are of the same nature with the infirmities, which believers humbly confess and deplore: and thus they maintain a confidence in direct opposition to scripture, and call it *faith*; nay, they deem this a high attainment, and “hope against hope,” in a sense, with which neither Abraham nor Paul were at all acquainted.

Mistaken notions of liberty likewise lead men into fatal delusions: for instead of counting the service of God perfect freedom, and seeking deliverance from the yoke of sin and Satan, from love of the world, and from the fear of man; they imagine liberty to consist in living according to their own inclinations, without remorse of conscience, or dread of consequences: just as numbers can form no idea of civil liberty, unless they be allowed to indulge their selfish passions without restraint. When therefore we exhort them to submit to the easy yoke of Christ, and to serve him in holy obedience; they exclaim that this is *legal*, and leads them into bondage; and they choose such teach-

ers as “promise them liberty, while they themselves are the slaves of corruption.”—These are a few of the innumerable ways, in which men deceive themselves, by hearing the word of truth without reducing it to practice.

But whence arises this fatal propensity to self-deception, in a matter of infinite importance? Our Lord answered this question, when he said “Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.” The human heart is prone to idolize the world, and to seek happiness in the enjoyment of it; and is averse to a life of practical godliness. But when a man is at all acquainted with the doctrines of the bible, his conscience becomes an unquiet inmate, unless some way be taken to silence its remonstrances. Various methods have therefore been adopted of reconciling a worldly life with the hope of future happiness: and self-flattery, which palliates a man’s vices, and enhances the value of his supposed virtues, is a powerful coadjutor in this attempt.—But among these plans perhaps no one is so cheap and convenient, as hearing and assenting to the gospel: if a man be able to persuade himself, that such a faith will save him. This requires less trouble and self-denial, than any other system: while it helps him to ascribe that decency of conduct, which secular motives impose, to religious opinions; and to con-

sider all his omissions and transgressions as defects which are common to believers. A superficial hearer of the word may thus easily suppose, that he is in the way of salvation, while he lives in habitual disobedience to the known commandments of God: and when the faithful address of a minister shakes this vain confidence; the man may be seduced to charge the blame on the doctrine, and to shrink from conviction by going to those places, where smoother and more comfortable things are spoken.—Could we therefore witness all that passes in the retirement, the family, and the dealings of those, who after a time forsake our ministry; we should perhaps not be at all surprized at losing them, though we must grieve to discover such awful self-deception.

These are the sources of this evil, which will certainly terminate in everlasting ruin, unless it be previously discovered and remedied.

IV. Then we consider the contrast here stated between the mere hearer, and the practical student of scripture.

The word of God, that perfect law of liberty through which the believer is freed from bondage and condemnation, is compared by the apostle to a mirror; in which a man beholds the reflection of his person, and by which he may adjust every

thing in his appearance after the most becoming manner. The mere hearer resembles one, who gives a transient look in this mirror; but taking little notice of his appearance, and bestowing no pains to alter any thing in his attire, "he goes his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was."—Thus many give a slight attention to the truth, and get a transient glimpse of their own state and character: but they dislike the mortifying discovery, are uneasy under the fleeting conviction, and have no inclination for that repentance and conversion, to which the scripture calls them. They therefore try to believe, that approbation and assent may suffice, and that the gospel does not require practice. They go and plunge themselves into business or pleasure, and soon forget their convictions: and thus remain ignorant of their accumulated guilt and urgent danger, and strangers to regeneration, reconciliation to God, the life of faith, the sweet obedience of love, and all those "things that accompany salvation."

On the other hand, the man, who stedfastly looks into the scriptures, comparing all his conduct, past and present, and even his thoughts, affections, tempers, motives, and words, with the holy law, who thus learns his whole duty to God and his neighbour, according to all his various relations and obligations; and who continues daily consi-

dering his ways, and contemplating himself in this faithful mirrour; will soon become acquainted with his own heart and character, and perceive his need of the mercy and grace proposed in the gospel. By persevering in this course of self-examination, without being offended by the discoveries he makes; he will speedily understand that he ought to humble himself before God, for sins more numerous than the hairs of his head: and experience will convince him, that he can neither atone for the least of his former transgressions, nor answer the righteous demands of the divine law; nay, that he cannot truly repent, except by the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit. His daily efforts will bring him more and more acquainted with his sins of omission and commission, the defilements of his duties, the hidden evils of his heart, the strength of his depraved propensities, and the power of habits and temptations. These things will render him weary of attempting to "establish his own righteousness," or to change his own nature. He will now be capable of understanding the words of the apostle; "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." The publican's prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he will now most cordially adopt; and the nature, glory, and preciousness of the free salvation revealed in the gospel will be more and more

unfolded to his view. Thus he will learn with increasing simplicity to plead the name of Christ in genuine faith; to come to the Father by him, and to rely solely on his righteousness, redemption, and mediation, for acceptance and eternal life.

In this manner the practical student of scripture, being justified by faith, and having peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, will make still further progress in the divine life. The convincing and enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit, through the instruction of the written word, will continually discover to him defects and defilements in his heart and conduct, which he had not before observed. Thus while he presses forward, and aspires after nearer and nearer conformity to his perfect rule; repentance, faith, watchfulness, and fervent prayer, will become more and more habitual, and as it were natural to him. His heart will grow more humble, and his conscience more tender, his dependence on Christ more simple, and his gratitude for redeeming love more abundant, in proportion to the degree of his sanctification. These things will render him likewise more compassionate, tender, forbearing, and forgiving; more patient and self-denying; and more ready to encounter dangers and difficulties, in promoting the cause of Christ among his fellow-sinners. And as no absolute perfection can be attained on earth; and as he deems all faulty and

deformed, which does not come up to the requirement of the holy law, and the spotless example of the Saviour; so no limits can be assigned to his discoveries and progress, during his continuance in this world.

This is the character described by the apostle, “he is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work; and he shall be blessed in his *doing*.” He is made wise unto salvation, and shall “abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost:” he shall find liberty and pleasure in the ways of God; be made useful to society, and a blessing to his connexions; and he shall “have an entrance administered unto him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

No man who duly considers these things can doubt the practical nature and tendency of the gospel. Christ is our sole Foundation; but no one builds on that Foundation, except he hears his sayings, and does them. The practical hearer’s faith is living; he is a wise man: and this will appear to all the world; when the folly of those who build upon the sand by a dead faith, by hearing and not doing, will be exposed to universal contempt. Alas, my brethren, how numerous are such nominal Christians; “who call Christ, Lord, yet do not the things that he says!” But unless the design of the gospel be answered in our hearts

and lives, the gospel itself will increase our condemnation.

Are any of you then sensible, that your hearing has hitherto failed to influence your practice? Let me conjure you, by the love you bear to your own happiness, not to put off the alarming conviction, by saying, "Go thy way, at this time, when I have a convenient opportunity I will call for thee." It is not yet too late; "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation:" But you know not how soon the Master of the house may shut to the door; and then it will be too late to begin to say, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" for he will silence every plea, and bid you "depart as workers of iniquity."

But have you, my brethren, begun seriously to practise what you know, and to enquire the will of God that you may do it? Blessed be the Lord, for his grace bestowed on you! Go on in this way, my beloved brethren; and even the most humiliating discoveries you make of yourselves, will serve to endear the gospel of salvation to you. "Then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord:" "For the path of the just shineth more and more to the perfect day." The practice of duty will prepare your hearts for the reception of truth; by removing those prejudices, with which the prevalence of carnal affections closes the understandings of the disobedient: and every

accession of spiritual knowledge will have a sanctifying and comforting effect upon your hearts.

Finally, were we as desirous of having our souls adorned with holiness, as most persons are of decorating the poor dying body; we should certainly make continual discoveries of our remaining uncomeliness, and be thankful for assistance in such researches: and we should make daily progress in sanctification; by “putting off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

SERMON XIV.

I CORINTHIANS, xiii. 13.

*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three;
but the greatest of these is charity.*

THE apostle, in this remarkable chapter, shews the Corinthians, that the most splendid and useful of those miraculous powers, which they emulously coveted and ostentatiously displayed, were far inferior in value to sanctifying grace: yea, that when united with the deepest knowledge of divine mysteries, the most self-denying liberality, and the most vehement zeal, they were nothing without charity; and did not so much as prove the possessor to be a real Christian of the lowest order. He then describes charity, as a man would define gold, by its distinguishing properties, which are the same in a grain as in a ton; but the more a man possesses, and the less alloy is found in the mass, the richer he is.—And having shewn, that charity would never fail; whereas miraculous

powers would cease, and knowledge itself would be swallowed up and lost in the perfect light of heaven, he adds, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."—It is evident, that he meant to sum up, in these three radical graces, the grand essentials of vital Christianity, to which all other holy affections may be referred. But as the word *charity* is now used for one peculiar expression of love, which is equivocal, and may be counterfeit: it will render our discussion more perspicuous to substitute *love* in the place of it; it being well known that the original word is generally thus translated. I shall endeavour, therefore,

I. To consider separately, the peculiar nature, exercise, and use of faith, hope, and love.

II. To shew in what respects love is the greatest of the three; and how this agrees with the doctrines of salvation by grace, and justification by faith alone.

The subject before us, my brethren, is of the greatest importance, and often fatally misunderstood. Let me then beg a peculiar measure of your attention; and let us lift up our hearts to God, beseeching him to "open our understandings, that we may understand the scriptures,"

and be guided into the knowledge of his holy truth.

I. Let us consider separately the peculiar nature, exercise, and use of faith, hope, and love.

We begin with *faith*. That peculiar act of the understanding, by which we avail ourselves of information, in those things which fall not under our own observation, and which do not admit of proof in a way of reasoning, is called *faith* or *believing*. If we credit testimony without sufficient grounds, we are unreasonably credulous: if we refuse to believe testimony, which has sufficient grounds of credibility, we are unreasonably incredulous. It is therefore extremely absurd to oppose *reason* and *faith*, as if contrary to each other; when in fact, faith is the use of reason in a certain way, and in cases which confine us to that peculiar exercise of our rational powers. *Believing* may be distinguished from *reasoning*, and in some cases opposed to it: but in opposing *faith* and *reason*, the friends of Christianity have given its enemies an advantage, to which they are by no means entitled.

It is evident to all observing men, that the complicated machine of human society is moved, almost exclusively, by that very principle, which numbers oppose and deride in speaking on religion. Testimony received and credited, directs

the determinations of princes and councils, of senates and military commanders, of tribunals and commercial companies, in their most important deliberations: and did they refuse to act, without self-evidence, demonstration, or personal knowledge; all their grand affairs must stagnate. But human testimony, though often fallacious, is deemed credible: they believe, decide, and carry their decisions into execution.—In the common concerns of life too, we believe a guide, a physician, a lawyer, and even those who provide our food; and the incredulous sceptick in such cases must be ruined, or starved, or perish by disease.

But “if the testimony of man be great, the testimony of God is greater.” The scripture is “the sure testimony of God; making wise the simple.”¹ It relates facts, which God hath attested; states doctrines which he hath immediately revealed; promises and assurances concerning the future, which he hath engaged to accomplish; and commands and ordinances, which he hath thus enforced with clearness and authority. All these things are intimately connected with our duty, safety, and felicity; they are made known for our warning, encouragement, and instruction: faith receives the information, and this excites and directs the believer’s activity. We may *reason* soberly and humbly concerning the evidences of

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 15--17.

revelation, and the meaning of scripture: but when these points have been ascertained, our reasonings are at end; for either faith receives the testimony of God, or unbelief makes him a liar.

Faith strictly speaking is, 'the belief of *the truth*;' with the application of it to ourselves, and a perception of its importance, holiness, excellency, and suitableness to our characters and circumstances. It is the gift and operation of God: for many of the truths, revealed in scripture, are so contrary to our pride, prejudices, and worldly lusts, that no evidence is sufficient to induce our cordial belief of them; till our minds have been prepared by preventing grace. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."¹ True faith should therefore be sought by earnest prayer; and lively gratitude is due to God from those that do believe.

Faith appropriates the declarations of scripture respecting things past, present, and future; whether they appear dreadful or desirable. The believer credits the testimony of God, concerning his own essential nature and perfections, and the righteousness of his law and government. In the same manner, he obtains information respecting

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

the creation of the world, the entrance of sin and misery, the fall of man, the evil and desert of sin, the deceitfulness and wickedness of the human heart, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the future judgment, and an eternal state of happiness or misery. Men may conjecture and dispute on these subjects: but faith, receiving the testimony of God with the teachableness of a child, satisfies the mind and influences the conduct, as if we saw the things believed. It is therefore impossible, *thus* to credit these doctrines, and not take warning to “flee from the wrath to come.” Faith must, in this case, produce fear of threatened punishment: and as it is always accompanied with some feeble discoveries of mercy; it will also in some degree soften and humble the heart to repentance, and excite earnest enquiries after salvation.

But we are especially called upon to believe the testimony of God concerning his Son. “This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” The numerous and decisive declarations of scripture on this subject have induced some persons to speak of faith, as exclusively meaning a reception of Christ for salvation: and no doubt this is the grand exercise and use of it. Yet in fact, unless we believe many other revealed truths with true humiliation of

heart; we never can believe in the Son of God in a saving manner. We may assent to the doctrines of grace, and abuse them; but we cannot understand their nature, glory, and suitableness to our case and circumstances.

True faith simply credits the divine record concerning the person of Emmanuel; his essential and eternal Deity, and his voluntary incarnation that he might be our Brother and Surety, "GOD manifest in the flesh:" his obedience of infinite value, and the atoning sacrifice of his death upon the cross; his resurrection, ascension, and intercession in the presence of God for us; his several offices of Prophet, Priest, and King; and all the various particulars, concerning his power, truth, love, fulness of grace, mediatorial authority, and future coming to judgment. This belief cannot be separated from a cordial compliance with his invitations, a thankful reception of him in all his characters and offices, an habitual dependence on him for salvation, and a constant application for all the blessings procured for us, by his sufferings and death. Thus we spiritually "eat his flesh and drink his blood;" which are "meat indeed and drink indeed:" and thus 'we feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.'

"To you that believe he is precious." In proportion to our faith, Christ becomes to us, "the Pearl of great price;" and we grow more and more solicitous, lest we should come short of him.

and his salvation. This renders us decided in renouncing other confidences, “counting all but loss, that we may win Christ, and be found in him;” diligently using all the means of grace, observing the directions given us, and making every sacrifice necessary for the securing of this main concern. Joyful hope will animate us with most lively gratitude. Advancing knowledge and matured experience will render our dependence more simple; and, receiving continually from the fulness of Christ the supply of all our wants, he will become more and more glorious in our eyes and precious to our hearts: while increasing sanctification, and abundant diligence in the work of the Lord, will enhance our sense of obligation, without in the least deducting from our simplicity of reliance on him as our “Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption.”—“We are crucified with Christ; nevertheless we live: yet not we, but Christ liveth in us; and the life that we live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us.”

True faith has likewise respect to the “exceeding great and precious promises” of scripture. These are sure testimonies of God ratified by all the engagements of the new covenant, in the blood of the great Mediator; and the promised blessings

belong to all true believers, though they cannot always perceive their own title to them; and to them exclusively.

The doctrines and promises of scripture relate very much to the person, offices, and influences of the Holy Spirit. If then we truly believe these divine testimonies, with application to our own wants, and perceive the value of these life-giving, illuminating, sanctifying, and comforting influences; we shall certainly depend on them continually.— Thus we shall *believe in* the Holy Ghost, and honour him together with the Father and the Son, as the triune God of our salvation.

“ Faith is” likewise “ the evidence of things not seen.” It perceives the hand of God, and hears his voice, in all the varied events of providence; it realizes his holy, heart-searching and gracious presence in all places; it penetrates invisible things; lays heaven and hell open to our view: contemplates the world of good and evil spirits with which we are surrounded; and looks forward to judgment and eternity, as just at hand. Thus it supplies the want of sight and sense. “ We endure, as seeing him that is invisible.”— “ We look not at the things which are seen, “ but at the things which are not seen.” We set God before us in our daily conduct and conversation: we perceive his special presence with us in his sacred ordinances; we speak to him in prayer and praise; we hear his word of instruc-

tion and direction; we have “fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ; we walk with God *by faith* :” we stand, we war, we run, we obey, and endure *by faith* : believing, we rely on God for strength, help, protection, support, and comfort according to his word; and thus are emboldened and enabled to face danger, resist temptation, renounce the world, bear the sharpest sufferings, and persevere in the hardest services, to which we can be called ¹.

It is evident that faith alone can answer these purposes; and that no other grace of Christianity, however excellent and necessary, can supply its place. Faith alone can appropriate the instructions of scripture; form our relation to Christ, that we may be “made the righteousness of God in him; seek supplies of every blessing from his fulness; rely on the faithfulness of God for the performance of his promises; supply the want of sight, and give nearness and certainty to invisible and eternal things.—But it is also evident that an assent to certain historical facts, or a system of inactive notions, or a groundless confidence of the divine favour, cannot be the faith of which such things are spoken. For this is a living and operative principle: it calls forth fear, hope, desire, aversion, love, gratitude, and every other affection of the soul, into most vigorous and a-

¹ Heb. xi.

biding exercise; and by their combined or varied energies overcomes the world, the flesh, and the devil, fights a good fight, and obtains a most honourable victory.

We proceed next to consider the peculiar nature, exercise, and use of hope.

Hope is the expectation of future good, real or supposed. We may believe and expect what we dread and would escape: we may desire, what we despair of obtaining: but we hope for those things alone, which we desire and in some measure expect. In one form or other it is the chief solace of human life: no man is happy at present; but all hope for happiness, and pursue it according to their different notions. The hope and pursuit afford some pleasure, and keep the mind from preying on itself: but disappointment is certain to all, who seek happiness in worldly things, whether they be prosperous or unsuccessful.—There is also a religious hope, which is no less delusive, and even more certainly fatal: because the mistake is not discovered till it is too late to make a wiser choice. A warranted hope of happiness in the favour of our God is, however, secure from disappointment; and ensures present support and everlasting felicity.—The apostle exhorts us to “be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in

“ us.” But, while almost all we meet avow a hope of being saved: there are very few, that are able to give a solid reason for this hope: and if it be unreasonable, it must be presumptuous. The sinner who warrantably hopes for everlasting felicity, and for various blessings in this present world, could assign such reasons as follow, for the hope that is in him; if he possessed the gift of utterance, and could orderly arrange his thoughts. ‘ The scriptures,’ he would say, ‘ have been proved ‘ to be the word of God, and I am satisfied on ‘ that head. They reveal the just and holy God, ‘ as merciful and gracious, forgiving sin and sav- ‘ ing sinners, through his beloved Son, whom he ‘ hath set forth to be a propitiatory sacrifice, and ‘ who “ is able to save to the uttermost all them “ that come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth “ to make intercession for them.” ‘ This divine ‘ Saviour invites all that will come to him, and ‘ adds: “ him that cometh unto me, I will in no “ wise cast out.” ‘ I know myself to be a vile ‘ sinner, and I repent in dust and ashes. I am ‘ conscious that I renounce all other pleas, own ‘ the justice of God in my condemnation; and sue ‘ only for mercy through Emmanuel’s blood;’ “ My soul longeth for God’s salvation, and I hope “ in his word:” ‘ I desire to be made willing to ‘ part with all for Christ; and I pray for true faith, ‘ and stronger faith. I perceive something of

‘ the nature and glory of God’s way of saving sin-
‘ ners, and I approve of it as worthy of him and
‘ suitable to men ; and I long to see and admire
‘ the displays of his glory more and more. I trust
‘ I have experienced in some degree that change
‘ of heart, that new creation, which the scriptures
‘ describe as accompanying salvation. My de-
‘ sires, conflicts, fears, sorrows, comforts, and
‘ state of mind coincide with what I read in the
‘ word of God, concerning his believing people in
‘ former ages. I trust I do feel some measure of
‘ contrition, reverence, and love of God, love of
‘ Christ and his people, and other affections, to
‘ which I once was wholly a stranger ; and it is
‘ my grief and burden, that I feel them no more,
‘ and am harassed by so many things contrary to
‘ the best desires of my heart. I long to serve the
‘ Lord with fervent zeal ;’ “ I delight in the law of
“ God after the inward man : but I feel another law,
“ —warring against this law of my mind. I can-
“ not do the things that I would :” ‘ and were it not
‘ for the mercy and grace of the Lord Jesus, this
‘ would make me most completely wretched. But
‘ I trust I do believe in him, and am interested in
‘ the promises made by him : thus I wait for in-
‘ creasing sanctification ; and at length expect per-
‘ fect holiness and happiness according to that ever-
‘ lasting covenant, which God hath “ confirmed
“ with an oath, that we might have strong conso-

“ lation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on
 “ the hope set before us.¹”

Thus the believer can give a reason for his hope: in general the word of God encourages the sinner to hope for mercy and grace; and in particular the work of the Holy Spirit on the believer's heart, “ seals him to the day of redemption,” and gives him a special warrant to expect the performance of all the promises of God to his soul. It is the earnest, the first fruits, the pledge of glory: it is renovation to the divine image; and while the believer feels filial affections towards his reconciled Father, “ the Spirit of adoption witnesseth with his spirit, that he is a child, and an heir, of God through Jesus Christ.” In proportion as a man has a right judgment in these matters, and consciously experiences these influences of the Holy Spirit, and has grace in lively exercise; his hope rises to full assurance: but misapprehension, weakness of faith, sloth, temptation, and quenching or grieving the Spirit, darken his evidence and weaken his confidence. This good hope through grace is obtained and preserved by holy diligence.²” But presumption of any kind may be acquired and maintained by the slothful. The former prevails most upon strict scriptural self-examination, and is cleared up by an increase of spiritual knowledge: but the latter cannot endure

¹ Heb. vi. 16—20.

² Heb. vi. 11. 2 Pet. i. 10.

close investigation; and would be destroyed by discoveries of the divine holiness, the excellency of the commandment, the evil of sin, and the real nature and tendency of the gospel. Genuine hope has many variations; it rises and sinks, like the mercury in the barometer; now it prevails and triumphs, and now it is shaken; and the possessor, not doubting either the power, truth, or love of Christ, is led to question whether he be a true believer, when he has been drawn into unsuitable tempers and conduct. But presumption is unfeeling: it resembles more the case of death than that of health; and therefore is generally invariable.

The true hope is living and active. "Every man, that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, as the Lord is pure." In proportion as it abounds, a man feels himself animated for every duty; and it is connected with the exercise of all other graces: "Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost." But the hypocrite's hope is solitary and inactive: instead of stimulating him to exertion, it soothes him into indolence and self-indulgence, and he cannot be excited to diligence, unless affrighted with the dread of hell. His confidence is a vain expectation of safety and happiness, by a presumptuous reliance on the promises, without a cordial obedience to the gospel, and acceptance of its salvation.

The living hope of a Christian "is the anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast."—The anchor is intended to retain the vessel in its station, notwithstanding tides, currents, and tempests; and it is generally useful to prevent it from driving, and running foul of other ships, on the strand, and on rocks or quicksands. In like manner we have a station to fill up: the fluctuating tides of fashion, opinion, and false doctrines; the temptations of Satan and his agents, the frowns of the world, and trials of various kinds, tend to drive us from it, to hurry us into some ruinous conduct, or within the reach of some tremendous whirlpool. But the hope of eternal happiness, and of all things needful for life and godliness, according to the express promises of God; with the cheering earnest and anticipation of these inestimable benefits, and the fear of coming short of them, keep us stedfast in our place, and to our duty. Thus we are animated to renounce present advantages, to endure hardships; to resist temptations, to face persecutors, and to cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart: even as the soldier, the mariner, and the merchant, are emboldened and excited to patience and perseverance, by the hope of the desired compensation of their peculiar dangers and fatigues: for despair of success would in all these cases damp men's ardour and enervate their endeavours.—This hope is peculiarly necessary in seasons of urgent danger or severe persecution, that the Christian may be rendered

“stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in
 “the work of the Lord; knowing that his labour
 “is not in vain in the Lord.” The sacred writers,
 therefore exhort believers to “hope unto the end;”
 and bestow much pains to exhibit the variety, ex-
 cellency, and glory of the promised blessings, in
 the most striking and affecting manner.—“Rejoice,”
 says our Lord, “and be exceeding glad, for great
 “is your reward in heaven.” “Our light affliction,
 “which is but for a moment worketh for us a far
 “more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”
 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus
 “Christ, who—hath begotten us again to a lively
 “hope;—to an inheritance incorruptible, and un-
 “defiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in
 “heaven for you.” “We are saved by hope, but
 “hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth
 “why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for
 “what we see not, then do we with patience wait for
 “it.” “God,—who hath given us everlasting
 “consolation and good hope through grace, com-
 “fort your hearts, and stablish you in every good
 “word and work.” “Now the God of hope fill
 “you with all peace and joy in believing, that ye
 “may abound in hope by the power of the Holy
 “Ghost.”⁴

These and many other scriptures shew, the im-

¹ Matt. v. 12. ² Cor. iv. 17. ¹ Pet. i. 3—8

² Rom. viii. 24, 25. ³ 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17. ⁴ Rom. xv. 13.

portance of lively and abounding hope, in the Christian warfare. By faith we discern the promised good afar off; in fervent desire we embrace it; and in hope, resting on the word and perfections of God, we patiently wait for it; midst discouragements, delays, conflicts, difficulties, and sufferings; for "It is good to hope, and quietly to wait the salvation of the Lord." This hope is frequently called *trusting in God*, or *trusting in Christ*; and it implies that steady reliance on his power, truth, wisdom and mercy, which takes the soul off from trusting in men or creatures, and rescues it from all self-confidence. Expecting happiness from God alone, according to his word, the believer parts with or refuses present things, in expectation of better blessings in reversion; and waits the Lord's time for them, seeks them in his way, and prepares for the enjoyment of them by following after holiness, and abounding in every good work. He knows that no feeble attempt or intended good work shall lose its reward, however unsuccessful, or ill requited among men: this produces "the patience of hope," and is connected with submission, contentment, and cheerful perseverance in well doing; while the believer seeks for glory, honour, and immortality: even as the Lord Jesus, "for the joy set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame." It is therefore called "the helmet of salvation," and "the breast-plate of hope:" for without it we are incapable of fighting the good

fight of faith: and we uniformly find, that in proportion as genuine hope prevails, we are prepared to wrestle, labour, or endure hardship; and when greatly discouraged, we are heartless in every undertaking, and unfit for every service.

From first to last of our Christian course, hope must be as the anchor, the helmet, and the breast-plate of our souls. How firmly soever we believe the doctrines of revelation: yet unless we have a warranted and holy expectation of obtaining the various blessings proposed to us, we shall go on feebly, even in smooth and prosperous scenes; and we should faint in times of difficulty. The more assured this true hope is, the greater will be our constancy and diligence in the ways of God: and while the presumptuous hope of the hypocrite is inefficacious and useless, often failing in life, and certainly expiring at death; the hope that hath been described, "is sure and stedfast:" it lays hold of the unfailing word of God; it is maintained by supplies of the Spirit of Christ, and encouraged by constant experience; and it will abide in its principle and exercise, till it is swallowed up in the enjoyment of heavenly felicity.

We now proceed to consider the peculiar nature, use, and exercise of love.

The apostle indeed in the chapter before us speaks principally of love to mankind; yet we cannot suppose, that he meant to exclude the love of God:

but he considered the Christian's love to his brethren whom he had seen, as the most unequivocal evidence of his love to God whom he had not seen.¹ The whole scripture, however, authorizes, and requires us to speak fully upon this subject: and surely no rational man, acquainted with the sacred oracles, will maintain, that acts of benevolence, without regard to God, and separate from genuine faith and hope, is *that* love, on which the apostle bestows such high encomiums. No doubt *this* abides in the heart and in the church, united with faith and hope, and is inseparable from them.—The holy law requires us to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength; and this is written in the inward parts of the redeemed sinner, by the renewal of the Holy Spirit. He thus learns supremely to love, admire, and adore the glorious excellences of God: to seek his happiness in him; to thirst after him or rejoice in him, above all other things; to feel lively gratitude for his boundless mercies; to devote himself willingly to his service; to manifest an ardent zeal for his glory, lively joy when his name is honoured, and poignant grief when impiety and iniquity triumph; and fervently to pray, “Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as in heaven.”

This love to God is particularly expressed in fervent affection to the Lord Jesus, “the bright-

¹ 1 John, iv. 20, 21.

“ness of his glory, and the express image of his person.” Through him sinners know, approach, trust, worship, and serve a God of infinite justice and holiness : and in his person and redemption the harmonious glory of all the perfections of the Godhead is displayed, more than in all his other works. It is indeed very remarkable, that every kind and degree of love which JEHOVAH claims by his holy law, is demanded for the Lord Jesus by his apostles and evangelists. So that, in supremely loving Christ, desiring, rejoicing, and glorying in him ; thanking, praising, and adoring him ; magnifying him in our bodies, whether by life or death ; being “purified *unto him* a peculiar people, zealous of good works,” honouring and obeying him unreservedly ; we evidently obey, honour, and love the Father, according to the requirements of his holy word. And this demonstrates that “He and the Father are One,” in the strictest sense imaginable.

The immense obligations, which redeemed sinners have received from the divine Saviour, render this love to him peculiarly reasonable and delightful : yet it is not merely gratitude, or lively emotions of the animal passions. It is a rational choice of the Lord as our Portion and Salvation ; an admiring love of every display of his perfections ; and a disposition to delight in doing his will, and promoting the manifestation of his glory among men. It is therefore the spring and first mover in all

spiritual worship and obedience, as well as the principal duty required from us. "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous." Under every dispensation, and in all possible circumstances, on earth, or in heaven, this must be the essence of true religion: and all external services are no further acceptable, than as they spring from love. Even the *fear*, which differs from profound reverence of that infinite excellency which we supremely love, though in the present state useful, yet diminishes as love gathers strength, and will cease when love shall be perfected.

This holy affection to our glorious Creator, Benefactor and Saviour, must be shewn by love to our neighbours and brethren. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself:" these words briefly comprehend the whole law of God in this respect: and our Lord's parable, or narrative, of the good Samaritan, hath taught us, that every human being, whatever be his nation or religion, and however he may have acted towards us, is our *neighbour*; entitled to our cordial good-will, and our kind offices, when within our reach and in need of our assistance. He himself hath far exceeded the kindness of the good Samaritan, in assuming our nature, and saving us rebels and enemies by his suffering and death upon the cross; and in both respects he hath said to us, "Go and do likewise."

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour." This

commandment therefore, if universally obeyed, would preclude all kinds and degrees of fraud, injustice, oppression, slander, and every other word and action, in the least injurious to any human being; yea, all hard thoughts and ill wishes, suspicion, resentment, envy, coveting, or selfishness. On the other hand love seeks the benefit of its object, and rejoices in his happiness: if then we love our neighbour as we ought, we shall desire to promote his good in every respect, by all suitable means in our power. In proportion as our love abounds, we shall be ready to deny ourselves, to labour, and to incur expence, in contributing to his advantage. If we really love our neighbour as we *ought to love ourselves*; we shall seek his highest good in the first place, and aim to render all our kind endeavours subservient to his everlasting welfare. His happiness is of equal value with our own; his soul, life, ease, peace, and reputation, are as important as our's. We ought therefore to seek his good sincerely and earnestly; and to give up inferior interests and endure inferior sufferings, when we can thus preserve him from heavier distress, or procure for him superior blessings: provided it can be done consistently with the duties of our several relations in life.—We should love what is amiable, respect what is honourable, praise what is commendable, excuse what is excuseable, bear with and forgive what is faulty, and put the best construction on what is doubtful, in our neighbour's

conduct; and commiserate and relieve his distresses: exactly as we would that others should do to us in similar circumstances.

We are indeed more immediately entrusted by the Lord, with the care of our own lives and souls; and required to provide especially for our children and near relatives: and in ordinary cases, we may not be able to shew active love, beyond our own very contracted circle. But universal benevolence will dictate prayers for all men: and on particular occasions we are required to exercise self-denial, and in a measure suspend our kindness to those near to us, that we may avail ourselves of an opportunity to relieve and serve those who are more remote from us.

This love of our neighbour is enforced, under the gospel by other motives, and admits of other modifications, than are expressly mentioned in the law. Our peculiar relation and obligations to Christ require us to love his people, as our brethren, in an especial manner. "A new commandment," says he, "I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."¹ And St. John says, it is, "the old commandment which was from the beginning:" and yet a "new commandment:"² that is, the old command enforced by new motives, and a recent example, and for other ends than formerly. They, whom we judge to be true believers,

¹ John, xiii. 34, 35. xv. 12.

² 1 John, ii. 7—11.

are entitled to our most endeared affection, most cordial complacency, tender sympathy and self-denying liberal assistance. "Forasmuch as ye did it to the least of these my brethren, ye did unto me." They should be our chosen companions, our bosom-friends, and dearer to us than any earthly relative, as our brethren in Christ, the objects of his special love, bearing his image, devoted to his service, and fellow heirs of heavenly felicity. We should labour, "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" to preserve harmony among "all that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity," however divided by external distinctions; to cast the mantle of love over their infirmities, and to shew an habitual disposition to cultivate peace with them, and do them good. "Hereby we know that we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren:" for we are now especially attached to the very persons, whom we were naturally disposed to despise and dislike.—Alas, that this peculiar mark of Christ's true disciples should be so little conspicuous in his visible church!

A conscientious regulation of all our relative affections, and a performance of the duties resulting from them, are next required of us: and when these are attended to from evangelical principles, and according to the precepts of Christ; they are so far from interfering with our love to God and to our neighbour, that they constitute an important part of our obedience. Love to particular

friends, and gratitude to benefactors should be so exercised, as to coincide with our general duty: all excessive attachments, as generally understood and celebrated, are partial, exclusive, and idolatrous affections; the love of a man's own image in another is person, self-love reflected, or the creature substituted in the place of the Creator. Love of our country likewise, while it consists with love to mankind at large, is love to our neighbour according to the degree of proximity, and may be expressed in seeking the real good of our own nation by every fair and equitable endeavour. But Roman and Grecian patriotism is downright selfishness, a bigotry in benevolence, instead of philanthropy. It is good-will to a few, foolishly seeking their prejudicial aggrandizement, at the expence of the ruin or misery of all the world besides. It is therefore the honour of Christianity, that it makes no mention of so proud, rapacious, and malignant a disposition.

Love to our neighbours as ourselves is also shewn by benevolence and compassion for men of no religion, of false religions, or even of the vilest characters. It forbids us to do them any injury, or to persecute them for their sentiments or practices; or any way to molest them, except as they become obnoxious to punishment for disturbing the peace of the community. We must not needlessly propagate reports to their disadvantage, even if true; much less may we slander and misrepresent them.

We ought to watch opportunities of doing them good, and conciliating them by kind usage; not disdainng, or despairing of, them; but praying and hoping that they may be converted from the evil of their ways, and saved from destruction. And this consists very well with separating from their company, "not bidding them God speed, "lest we partake of their evil deeds;" and all other protests, which we are commanded to enter against their principles and conduct.

We are even required to love our most virulent and injurious enemies and persecutors; after the example of the Lord's love to us, when rebels against him. Not that we ought to love them more than our friends and brethren; as some have misinterpreted these precepts, that they might expose them to contempt. But we should still bear good-will to our foes, wish them well and pray for them, watch against all resentment, and not suffer ourselves to be overcome with evil, but still strive to overcome evil with good. We ought to keep our hearts diligently, that we may not rejoice either in their crimes, disgrace, or misery; to cultivate compassion for them, especially in respect of their souls; to shew a forbearing, forgiving, and reconcilable disposition; to spare no pains, and grudge no expence or self-denial, in attempting to do them good; and to seize on every opportunity of relieving their temporal distresses, in order to make way for seeking their more important

advantage. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." In these cases, we should be ready to relieve the most wicked and ungrateful: but in ordinary circumstances our brethren and friends have a prior claim to our special kindness; even as our heavenly Father causes "his sun to shine and his rain to descend on the wicked and ungrateful," but reserves his peculiar blessings for his children.

The example of the Lord's love to us when enemies, every part of the plan of redemption, the ministry of reconciliation, and the past and present kindness of our God to his believing servants, furnish motives and arguments, for the constant practice of all those loving dispositions, and that peaceable and affectionate conduct; which are indispensably required of Christ's disciples, as the only sure evidences that they are true believers, and that their sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

Let us compare these things with the apostle's description of love, as stated in the context. "Love," says he, "suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not: love vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; does not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity; but rejoiceth in the truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all

“ things.” St. Paul doubtless spake of love to men for the Lord’s sake: love expressed both by doing and suffering; love to both their bodies and souls: a patient, long-suffering, unostentatious, disinterested, prudent, modest, unsuspecting, condescending, self-denying, forgiving, and fervent affection to our neighbours and brethren; expressed in the persevering use of every means suited to do them good; and unwearied, by suffering or ill-usage, in seeking to accomplish this benevolent and compassionate object. Next to the example of Christ; the conduct of the apostle himself forms undoubtedly the best exposition of his language, that was ever yet given.

II. Then we proceed, very briefly to shew, in what respects love is greater than faith and hope; and how this consists with the doctrine of salvation by grace, justification by faith alone.

Love is greater than faith and hope; because it constitutes the end for which faith and hope are appointed and rendered effectual. “ The end of “ the commandment,” or the message of the gospel, “ is love, out of a pure heart, and of a good “ conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” It is the design of the whole gospel to recover men from a state of apostacy, enmity, selfishness, and malig-

1 Tim. i. 5.

hly, to that love of God and man which the law commands; and to induce them, by obligations of inestimable value; and by new principles implanted in the heart, to express that love in all their tempers and conduct. This salvation, through the blood of Christ, can only be perceived and applied by *faith*: and the completion of it is the object of *hope*: but *love* is the disposition, health, and felicity, to which man must be restored, in connexion with forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God. It is the prize itself, of which faith and hope must gradually put us in possession. In proportion as we love, we “dwell in God, and God in us;” we anticipate heaven, and possess the blessing: for God is Love, and heaven is love. A magnificent edifice cannot be erected without scaffolding; yet the building is greater than the scaffolding, being the sole end for which that is necessary: and when it is finished the scaffolding is removed as an useless encumbrance.

Love will endure for ever; but faith and hope will soon be swallowed up in sight and enjoyment. In heaven they will be no longer wanted: but love will there be perfected; and every alloy of envy, selfishness, prejudice, or aversion removed; every uneasy, self-denying exercise changed for such as are more delightful; and all coldness and deficiency remedied. The blessed inhabitants will love God with their whole souls, and each other as themselves;

and the felicity of every individual will increase the joy of all the rest. Love must therefore be greater than faith and hope; because more excellent in its nature, and more enduring in its use. Faith and hope are only necessary in this introductory scene; though honourable to God and profitable to us in the highest degree: but the former will flourish for ever, the business, element, joy, and glory of heaven itself; uniting God and all holy creatures in the most perfect harmony and felicity.¹

Yet love cannot perform the functions of faith or hope, any more than the eye can perform the office of the ear, or the hand that of the foot. However excellent, it can do nothing towards justifying a sinner. The little measure of it, to which we here attain, can neither reverse the curse of the broken law, nor form our bond of union with Christ, that we may be justified in that "righteousness of God, which is upon all, and unto all that believe." Even were our love perfected, previous to justification, it could not atone for past sins, or merit everlasting life: but in fact it is the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, and the seal of our gratuitous justification. The instructions of scripture concerning love, when duly considered, prove our need of this free salvation: and the

¹ Col. iii. 14.

measure of it to which we are restored is a part of that saluation, and an earnest and evidencē of the whole. It is therefore very obvious to see, that love is greater than faith or hope; that “we are” nevertheless, “saved by grace, through faith;” and that “he who believeth shall be saved, and he who believeth not shall be damned.”

My brethren, let us learn from this important subject, not to oppose one part of scripture to another, as many fatally do. That apparent love, which does not spring from faith, and is not accompanied by repentance, humility, hope, patience, and other holy dispositions, is a counterfeit: and so is the faith that does not work by love, and the hope which does not purify the heart. That love to our neighbour, which is not the result of love to Christ, is not the love which the sacred writers extol; nor can we love the bodies of men aright, if we neglect their souls; or regard their souls, if we do not relieve their temporal wants as we have opportunity and ability.

While we hold fast the principles of the gospel, let us beware of barren notions, spiritual pride, and a vain glorious use of our endowments. These may be splendid in the judgment of man: but they are nothing, and worse than nothing, in the sight of God. A bitter, boasting, and censorious zeal characterizes “the wisdom, that is

“from beneath; and is earthly, sensual and devilish:” not that “which is from above, and is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” — Let us then, my brethren, follow after love: but let us see to it that it be the genuine affection, the nature and effects of which the scripture describes, and which connects the various parts of Christianity into one consistent whole.

We may likewise observe, that the least degree of those holy tempers, which are common to believers, is inconceivably more valuable to the possessor, than those shining gifts and accomplishments, by which some are distinguished, but which may exist without living faith. Such were the gifts of tongues and prophecy, miraculous powers, or apostolical authority, which might exist apart from saving grace: and such are learning, genius, eloquence, and other admired endowments, which men covet, envy, or ostentatiously display.

But next to the possession of that holiness which inseparably accompanies salvation; we should desire and seek such gifts, as may qualify us for the duties of our several stations; and we should pray earnestly, that “Our love may abound yet more and more in knowledge

¹ James, iii. 13---18.

“and in all judgment; that we may approve
 “things that are excellent; that we may be sin-
 “cere and without offence, till the day of Christ:
 “being filled with the fruits of righteousness,
 “which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and
 “glory of God.”

Phil. i. 9—11.

SERMON XV.

PHILIPPIANS, i. 27.

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

ST. Paul wrote this epistle, as well as some others, from his prison at Rome: and it is manifest that the Lord was with him, as he had been with Joseph in similar circumstances; which rendered his confinement unspeakably more pleasant, than a splendid palace with a guilty conscience and ungovernable passions. Instead of dejection, murmurs, or resentment, we find the apostle uniformly employing the language of cheerfulness, confidence, and exultation. He declares that “to him to live was Christ, and to die gain.” All his credit, interest, business, and pleasure in life, consisted in communion with Christ, and earnest endeavours to glorify him and promote his cause: and he was sure, that death, in whatever form it should arrest him, would prove his richest advantage.—What a blessed religion is this, which can turn the king of terrors into a kind friend, and the

loss of all terrestrial things into the most valuable of acquisitions! What, my brethren, can wealth, reputation, authority, genius, or philosophy propose, which is comparable to this? Why then should you hesitate to sell all, and purchase the Pearl of great price?

But though the apostle had a longing “desire to depart and be with Christ, as far better;” yet he was willing to continue on earth, “for the furtherance and joy of faith” of his beloved people.—As if a pardoned rebel should voluntarily submit to the inconveniences and sufferings of a dungeon, in order to recommend the clemency of his prince to other criminals; or be helpful to those, who having likewise received mercy, were for some important purposes retained a while longer in confinement.

Hence he took occasion to exhort the Philippians in the following words, “Only let your conversation be, as it becometh the gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries.”—From the part of this exhortation, contained in our text, I shall endeavour,

I. To give a compendious view of the gospel of Christ.

II. To shew, that this gospel, when rightly

understood and truly believed, will produce a correspondent conduct and conversation.

III. To mention some leading particulars in which “a conversation becoming the gospel” more especially consists.

IV. To make some remarks on the emphatical word “Only.”

I. I would attempt to give a compendious view of the gospel of Christ.

We know that the word rendered *gospel* signifies *glad tidings*; and a preacher of the gospel is a messenger or herald, bringing and publishing good news. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things?!”

The Ephesians, having formed the design of building the celebrated temple of Diana, were at a loss where to procure a sufficient quantity of the finest marble, to accomplish the plan: and it is recorded; that a certain person, in this emergency, found a quarry at no great distance, exactly suited to the purpose. Running therefore without delay to inform the citizens of this fortunate event, he was saluted, and afterwards called, *Evangelus* or *The*

bringer of good tidings; a name of exactly the same import; with that rendered a preacher of the gospel, or an evangelist. But though his tidings were infinitely less important and joyful than our's; it may be questioned, whether any whole city ever thus gladly welcomed the message of salvation; and we know that in general it meets with a very different reception.

Good tidings often derive a great part of their value, from their suitableness to the case of those who hear them. The promulgation of good laws and the impartial administration of justice, though valuable blessings in themselves, can give no pleasure to condemned malefactors; but a report of the king's clemency, or an assurance of a pardon, would suit their case, and tend to cheer their drooping hearts. An act of grace is glad tidings to confined debtors, though it may give umbrage to their creditors: and the arrival of a fleet with provisions in a time of urgent famine, occasions a joy, of which such as live in plenty can form no adequate conception. We must therefore understand something of our own condition, before we can cordially welcome the gospel of Christ: and inattention or mistake, in this respect, forms one grand reason, why so many slight the message of salvation. But lectures on moral duties, separated from the doctrines of grace, no more meet the case of lost sinners; than extracts from the statute-book can give comfort and hope to condemned criminals,

We may know something of our situation by facts ; and the scripture further explains the humiliating and alarming subject. It cannot be denied that the world is full of crimes and miseries ; this is equally certain, whether men believe or disbelieve the Bible. Even they who are averse to the doctrine of human depravity, when applied to themselves and their connexions ; shew by the caution with which they transact their affairs, that they consider mankind in general as basely selfish : and he who at first disdains this sentiment, as unjust and illiberal, will be at length constrained to adopt it, or become a prey to designing men. Hence it is, that incautious young persons, having been repeatedly deceived, often grow suspicious and peevish as they advance in years : and manifest their vexation by reviling this or the other class of men. As if the fault lay in their rank or profession, and were not common to the human species, however restrained, disguised, or modified ; except as true religion produces an effectual change of disposition.

At the same time, it is evident, that all our comforts are entwined with cares and disquietudes ; every enjoyment, after a while, palls and grows insipid ; all our possessions are precarious, and may either be torn from us, or become the causes of the most exquisite anguish. Pain and sickness are entailed upon us : death is certain, and who knows how near ? Its approach is dreadful, its stroke

inevitable, and its *visible* effects intolerably mortifying. A dark gloom overshadows the rest : who but he that believes the sure testimony of God, can say, what is beyond the grave? Yet there are forebodings of future retribution, which most men experience to their additional alarm : so that numbers seem to suffer many deaths in fearing one. To escape such distressing reflections, they who are not confined by daily business, have recourse to dissipation. These at first yield a childish delight ; but soon become irksome, unless novelty be superadded by unceasing variety. This is the real secret of publick and private diversions ; and of the liberality with which immense sums are expended, in encouraging new species of amusement, however frivolous and absurd. These enable men, for a moment, to escape from the tediousness of life, or the anguish of solitude and reflection ; and tend to promote forgetfulness of God, of death, and of a judgment to come.

We appeal to every man's feelings and observation whether this description does not accord with facts? and whether it have any dependence on any set of religious opinions. Let us then enquire what light the scriptures throw upon the subject. There we learn, that " God made man in his own image," and created the world " very good:" but that the first parents of our race ungratefully rebelled against their bountiful Creator, and disobeyed his express and easy command. Thus " by one man

“ sin entered into the world, and death by sin ;
“ and so death passed upon all men, in that all
“ have sinned.” The holy image of God was also
effaced, and from that time man was naturally in-
capable of spiritual felicity, dead in sin, and prone
to every kind of evil.

When the *root* of our race thus fell, all the
branches fell with him, and became mortal and
sinful ; from the heart of fallen men evil thoughts,
words, and works, continually proceed : and the
natural effect of their crimes unites with the righ-
teous indignation of God, in rendering this life a
scene of labour and sorrow : and as, “ it is appoint-
“ ed to all men once to die, and after death the
“ judgment ;” still more terrible miseries may
justly be dreaded in a future world. A criminal
may suffer many things previous to his trial and
condemnation ; but his principal punishment fol-
lows afterwards. And as the human soul is sub-
ject to sinful passions, corresponding to the dis-
eases of the body : we not only must inevitably be
exposed to condemnation at the tribunal of God ;
but we also carry in our lapsed nature the seeds of
misery and destruction.

We have, however, another view given us, in
the sacred oracles, of our actual condition, still
more suited “ to stop every mouth, and to bring
“ in all the world guilty before God.”—We are
doubtless, as reasonable creatures, accountable to
our supreme Governor and Judge, for every part

of our conduct; and his holy law is the rule, by which every disposition, word, and action must be tried. Now, who does not feel, that he hath in many instances violated the reasonable and righteous commandments of God? Who hath not heard that “cursed is every one, that *continueth not in* “*all things* written in the book of the law to do “them?”

Thus “the scripture hath concluded all under “sin:” and it was not without *cause*, I hope not without *meaning*, that we this morning added, after each of the commandments, ‘Lord, have ‘mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep ‘this law.’

The man, who carefully compares his past and present conduct with this most strict and spiritual standard, will soon find his own conscience bring in a verdict against him: “And if our hearts “condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, “and knoweth all things.” No repentance or amendment can compensate for past offences; because we cannot in any instance exceed our present duty; and our debt increases in proportion as we still fall short of perfect obedience. Nor can we estimate the intrinsick evil of our sins against the infinite majesty of heaven, or the punishment we deserve for our ungrateful rebellion.

When we attempt to frame our conduct by the holy law of God, we feel a surprizing reluctance

and backwardness to this most reasonable service, and a strong propensity to disobedience. Evil dispositions, though common to all, are in some exceedingly strengthened by habit, and rendered ungovernable by peculiar temptations. Such men, therefore, as have serious thoughts and form good purposes, commonly find their resolutions enervated, and their endeavours baffled: and after some fruitless efforts, they return to their former course of life; unless relieved by the gospel of Christ.

When these things are seriously considered, the condition of mankind appears truly deplorable. Related to God and an eternal world; exposed to death and a future judgment; already guilty of many heinous crimes, and propense to increase the number; liable to final condemnation, and “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction;” what can any one do, to rescue or ransom himself or his brother from the awful sentence already published by the Judge, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels?” It is in vain to reason and dispute against facts, and the sure testimony of scripture: “Who art thou that repliest against God? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker?”

Let us rather submit to his righteousness, and seek that relief which his gospel proposes to us. The Lord, against whom we have rebelled, hath revealed himself to us, as “merciful and gracious, “forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;” and hath made way for the exercise of his boundless mercy, in harmony with infinite justice and holiness, in the person, redemption, and mediation of his beloved Son. And the divine Saviour, having made a complete atonement for sin, brought in everlasting righteousness, and triumphed over all our enemies, now reigneth Lord of all worlds, and is “able to save to the uttermost all them that “come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth to “make intercession for them.”

The proposal of mercy and grace, “without “money and without price,” to the chief of sinners; the pressing invitations, and persuasions, with which God doth by his ministers beseech us to be reconciled to him; the actual pardon and complete justification of every true believer; the gift of the Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify our souls; the exceeding great and precious promises, privileges, and engagements of the new covenant; and the present comfort and future inheritance of the Lord’s adopted children, might be particularly insisted on, in discussing the subject. These are in all respects good news, glad tidings, most needful for us, suited to our case, sufficient for our happiness, springing from love unspeakable, and

terminating in the everlasting salvation and glory of all, who obtain an interest in them. This is the gospel of Christ; the most rejoicing report, that ever reached the ears of mortal man. Little indeed has been said on such a subject: yet that little may serve to introduce an attempt,

II. To shew, that this gospel, when rightly understood and truly believed, will produce a correspondent conduct and conversation:

This will appear, if we consider the information given us, on the most interesting subjects, and such as are most intimately connected with our judgment and practice. "That God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." The discoveries made to us in the gospel, concerning the mysteries of the Godhead and the harmony of the divine perfections, are suited to excite our highest admiration, adoration, and love; and to make us exclaim, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!" And hence we must perceive, that God is worthy of all possible love, worship, confidence, and obedience; that happiness consists in his favour; that his image is beauty and excellency, and his service perfect freedom:

The views which the gospel of Christ gives us of

the holy law of God, as worthy to be honoured, both in its requirements and sanctions, by the obedience and atoning sacrifice of him whom all angels worship, is suited to impress our minds with the deepest sense of its excellency and authority. The clear revelation of an eternal state of righteous retributions, and of the unmingled happiness or misery which succeeds this present life, is sufficient, when truly believed, to swallow up all our anxiety about this vanishing scene; and to make the eager pursuits of worldly men appear as frivolous as the sports of children, or as infatuated as the mirth of condemned criminals, in a state of intoxication.

The gospel shews us also the *evil* of sin in the most affecting light. "We know that the judgment of God is according to truth:" and here we especially learn his judgment in this important concern. The language of the gospel is that of infinite and everlasting love and mercy: yet it declares sin to be so enormous and malignant an evil, that, rather than leave it unpunished, "God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." How can an enlightened believer look to the cross, without mourning for his sins, abhorring them as the murderers of Christ his Lord, and earnestly longing for the destruction of every evil propensity from his heart and nature?

Various other subjects might be mentioned, but they frequently call for our attention. The worth

of an immortal soul, the ruined state of mankind, the vanity of worldly prosperity, and many similar instructions, emphatically conveyed to us by the gospel, are exactly suited to form the believer to a holy and heavenly temper and conversation.

The knowledge of our duty, and of the divine authority by which it is enjoined us, is not sufficient for practical purposes, in the present state of human nature: our affections must also be influenced by such powerful motives, as may preponderate against all that can be cast into the opposite scale. But *proximity* gives earthly things an immense advantage. As objects appear large when near, but seem to diminish when removed to a distance: so *present* things are considered as important beyond all proportion; while things *future*, though immensely more valuable, are thought to be of little consequence, and scarcely possess any influence over the minds of men in general. But *faith* (like a telescope), brings objects invisible to unbelievers near to the soul; and enables us to contemplate, as *real* and of infinite magnitude, those things which other men consider as doubtful, remote, and uninteresting: while the Holy Spirit, producing in us a new and heavenly nature, makes us capable of perceiving the glory, and relishing the excellency, of spiritual blessings. Thus they obtain the ascendancy in our judgment and choice; we become spiritually minded, and savour the things which are of God; bonds which fastened

our hearts to earthly objects are broken; the balance turns the other way; and we set our “affections on things above, not on things on the earth.”

“Fear not,” says our Lord to his disciples, “Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”—When the gospel is really understood and believed, we “fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into heavenly rest, any of us should seem to come short of it;” and this apprehension prevails over our dread of labour, reproach, scorn, self-denial, or persecution: yea, the fear of divine chastening, of grieving the Spirit, of a wounded conscience, or of dishonouring the doctrine of Christ, is a powerful motive to watchfulness and prayer. The desire of everlasting felicity in the favour of God, and of the present consolations found in communion with him, subordinate our hungerings and thirstings after earthly objects.—“A kingdom that cannot be moved;” “glory, honour, and immortality;” “treasures in heaven that fail not,” and “pleasures at God’s right hand for evermore,” are blessings commensurate with our largest wishes and capacities, and durable as our immortal souls: and the lively hope of this incorruptible inheritance, grounded on the sure word of God, and sealed by his sancti-

fyng Spirit; is capable of triumphing over all our expectations of temporal advantages, distinctions, and gratifications; and of animating the soul to "patient continuance in well-doing." Love to our God and Saviour, likewise, unites its powerful influences: and while we cleave to him with fervent desires, rejoice in him with admiring gratitude, and are fervently zealous for the honour of his name; we shall feel constrained by this supreme affection "to live no longer to ourselves, "but to him who died for us and rose again."— Thus we shall be prepared to venture, suffer, and labour, in seeking to glorify his name and recommend his precious salvation.

The encouragements of the gospel also are very efficacious. The sinner who attempts to amend his life, according to the word of God, is very liable to grow weary in his attempts. The law seems to say him, "Pay me that thou owest;" and he appears to himself further and further removed from the righteousness, which he went about to establish, and that victory over his passions which he expected speedily to accomplish. On the other hand if he make the principles of morality, or some *mitigated law* his standard: he is at a loss to determine how much obedience will entitle him to acceptance; and uncertainty tends to discouragement. For the diligent and conscientious are in this case always harassed with doubts;

and none but the heedless and self-confident think themselves *good enough* to be the objects of the divine favour.

But Christ invites all that are athirst to come to him, and “he will give them of the Fountain of the water of life freely;” and assures the trembling sinner, that “he will in *no wise cast out* any one “that comes to him.” It runs in this gracious tenour, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth.” As therefore every blessing is freely given, for Christ’s sake, to the poor supplicant, however unworthy: nothing but pride, unbelief, contempt of heavenly things, aversion to God and religion, or idolatrous love of the world, can exclude any sinner from this great salvation. Every part of the plan is free from ambiguity: our wants are distinctly stated; promises are given exactly answering to them; means are appointed, in which we may apply for the performance of these promises; and God pledges the honour of his faithfulness, that every one, who seeks the blessing in the appointed way, shall certainly obtain it. Delays and difficulties may intervene to prove our sincerity: but sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than any word of God shall fail of its accomplishment.

The assistance, likewise, proposed by the gospel, tends to produce a peculiar conduct and conver-

sation in the true believer. Evil habits, corrupt propensities, bad connexions, and strong temptations are not easily broken off and mastered; and our resolution is found by experience to be unequal to the conflict: but the promised assistance of the Holy Spirit enables the Christian to surmount every obstacle, and to resist and overcome all his enemies. He feels he can do nothing of himself; but he finds, “that he can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him.”—Thus by “waiting on the Lord he renews his strength,” and rises superior to those difficulties, which all other men find in the event to be insurmountable.

The assurances, made of an abundant present and future recompence, to those who renounce temporal things for the sake of Christ and the gospel; the supports afforded in seasons of trial and affliction; the authoritative and perfect example set before us; the obligations conferred upon us, and the glorious prospects that open to our view, are all of them exceedingly influential on the believer’s spirit and conduct. But we must proceed,

III. To mention some leading particulars, in which “a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ,” more especially consists.

Every doctrine of the gospel requires, and is suited to produce, *humility* in all its variety

of exercises. The whole seems arranged on purpose to lay us low in self-abasement, to exclude all boasting and glorying in ourselves, to produce deep repentance, to render us poor in spirit and contrite in heart, and to form our dispositions teachable, lowly, unambitious and unassuming. When therefore we speak and act in this manner, our conversation is consistent with our principles, and becomes our profession: but self-confidence, self-importance, vain-glorious vaunting, desire of praise or pre-eminence, and an unteachable, dogmatizing, or overbearing deportment, are more unbecoming and odious in one who professes to believe the gospel, than in any other person.

From this deep humility, patience, contentment, and thankfulness must proportionably arise. "It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed:" our sufferings are less than our iniquities; our mercies are invaluable and unmerited; our situation is appointed by God our Saviour, in perfect wisdom, truth, and love: our light afflictions are counterbalanced by divine consolations; and they "work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." So that it becomes us to be resigned, satisfied and thankful, in every circumstance: and repining fretfulness and discontent, are entirely inconsistent with evangelical principles.

Confidence in God likewise peculiarly becometh

the gospel of Christ. "The Lord is our Light, and our Salvation: whom then shall we fear?" "If God be for us, who can be against us?" To be calm and collected in perilous situations; to recognize the hand of God in the alarming events of life, and hence to assume courage and cheerful expectation; to rely on his providential care amidst temporal losses and difficulties; and in every case to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good;" becomes the character of his redeemed people. But too often he may rebuke us and say, "Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith?"—We act also consistently with our principles, when we take pleasure in attending on the ordinances of God; when we count the holy day of rest honourable and delightful; when we are glad to have it said to us, "Let us go unto the house of the Lord;" and when we prefer his courts, and the communion of the saints, above all other places of resort, and every other kind of society. It becomes the professors of the gospel, to abound in praises and thanksgivings; to reverence the name and the word of God; to worship him in their families with evident alacrity as well as punctuality; to seek his blessing on every undertaking; to praise him for every deliverance and benefit; to act habitually as in his presence; to devote themselves to his service; and to seek all their happiness from him: and, whatever is con-

trary to this is unbecoming the gospel, and dishonourable to our profession.

Even worldly men, while they charge our doctrines with a licentious tendency, expect more from us in our conduct towards them, than they do from each other. This evidently appears to be the case : for a single instance of immorality, in one that professes the gospel, excites general attention, and becomes a topick of discourse ; while the numberless crimes of other men are very slightly noticed.—This should remind us, that strict integrity, veracity, sincerity, and punctuality to our engagements, become our profession : and that both the world and the church will charge us with inconsistency, if we at all deviate from this direct uprightness of conduct and conversation. An inoffensive deportment is likewise necessary, if we would walk “worthy of God,” and “as it becometh saints.” We must no more injure a man, from heedlessness, than from selfishness : We must not wound any person’s character, interrupt his domestick comfort, or needlessly disquiet his mind. We should carefully avoid exciting men’s passions, provoking them to anger, or tempting them to envy, ambition, or discontent. We should “study to be quiet and mind our own business,” without intermeddling with other men’s matters ; and to be peaceable, orderly, and industrious neighbours and members of the community. We ought so to avoid evil, and the

appearance of evil, that none may have any thing to say against us, except it be for our religious peculiarities.

General benevolence also becomes the gospel of rich grace and mercy. Every man almost, may at some times, by retrenching superfluities, do a little to shew his compassion and goodwill to his afflicted neighbours. From those "to whom much is given much is required." There are likewise various other methods, by which a friendly disposition may be manifested; and this is peculiarly ornamental to the gospel. The more entirely we renounce all dependence on our good works, the greater alacrity and zeal we should manifest in performing them: and this will be our disposition, if, indeed "we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," and understand our obligations to him, who "loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Indeed, even in this lukewarm age, the excellency of the gospel does appear in this respect; for the liberality of those, who profess to rely on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, is vastly greater, in proportion to their circumstances, than that of such persons, as expect in part at least to atone for their own sins and to purchase heaven, by their good works. But "we beseech you, brethren, to abound more and more."

We should also exercise meekness, forgiveness of injuries, and unwearied perseverance in endeavouring to overcome evil with good: for these things

peculiarly become those, who own themselves so deeply indebted to the pardoning mercy and abundant grace of God our Saviour. An exact attention to every relative duty: a condescending, affable, and modest demeanour, “in honour preferring one another:” a constant endeavour to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;” to promote brotherly love; and to concur in every design, for advancing the purity and enlargement of the Church, and the benefit of mankind, are evidently and eminently becoming the gospel of Christ.

To these we should add, habits of strict sobriety and temperance; moderation and regard to expediency in the use of things lawful, and in every worldly pursuit; and indifference about external decoration; an entire disregard to those frivolous amusements, in which numbers waste their time and substance; a disinterested conduct, remote from all suspicion of covetousness; a strict government of the passions; and a tongue bridled and refrained from vain and improper discourse, but prepared to speak such things as are edifying and useful. These are evidently parts of that conversation which becometh the gospel of Christ: and reflection may enable every one to add to this specimen many others of a similar nature.—We proceed therefore,

IV. To make some observations on the emphatical word “Only.”

Some persons think, that the apostle meant in this manner to intimate the reasonableness of his exhortations; and no doubt we have abundant cause to consider them in this light: yet I apprehend that this is not the import of the expression. It rather implies that nothing could prove injurious in the event to professed Christians, provided their conversation were consistent with their principles. And we may apply this general instruction to various cases.

There may be wars, and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, revolutions, and distress of nations with perplexity; yea, the sun shall be turned into darkness, the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll, the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth with all its works shall be burnt up: but none of these events need alarm the consistent Christian: For “ what shall separate
 “ us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or
 “ distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or peril, or
 “ the sword? Nay, in all these things we are more
 “ than conquerors through him that loved us.”
 “ God is our Refuge and Strength; a very pre-
 “ sent help in trouble: therefore we will not fear
 “ though the earth be removed, and the mountains
 “ be carried into the depths of the sea.”²

Affecting changes may likewise take place in our families; our beloved relatives may be torn from us, our friends alienated, and our property lost;

¹ Rom. viii. 35—39.

² Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

poverty, contempt, and sickness may oppress us ; and we may fall under unmerited censure and reproach, so that even our brethren may mistake our case and character, as Job's friends did his : but " if our conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ," none of these things can hurt us. The Lord will enable us to rejoice in the testimony of our conscience ; he will plead our cause, and vindicate our reputation ; he will not leave us comfortless, but will afford us proportionable supports : " No weapon formed against us shall prosper, and " every tongue that riseth against us in judgment " we shall condemn ;" and when we have been tried we shall come forth as gold purified from the furnace.

Changes may likewise take place in the church : many who have been useful to us, may be removed, and among them the very " ministers by whom we believed : " nay, such persons, as we most looked up to, may " forsake Christ having loved this present world ;" or become zealous teachers of destructive heresies. But if our conversation be consistent with our profession : our own experience of the Lord's faithfulness, and the sanctifying efficacy of his word, will preserve us from fatal effects ; and teach us by such events, to be more watchful, and simple in our dependence on divine grace.

Some persons may be perplexed with difficulties, in respect of certain points of doctrine : but if they truly embrace the salvation of Christ, and walk

worthy of it; they will be at length led to establishment in the truth. “If any man *will* do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.” An upright heart and an obedient will directly tend to free the mind from the clouds of various prejudices and passions, to produce teachableness, and to improve spiritual discernment: and there are numerous promises of divine teaching to persons of this description. But they, “who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil,” are given up to strong delusions, and fall into final condemnation.

Difficulties also occur to many, in determining whether they be in a state of salvation or not; nor are they able, after much self-examination, to decide the important question. To these likewise we may say, “Only let your conversation be, as it becometh the gospel of Christ:” and this will have a powerful, though gradual efficacy, in producing the desired satisfaction. “Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.” “For the path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

The exhortation before us also points out, to those who are labouring to do good in their families and connexions, or in a more extensive sphere, the grand method of obtaining the desired success: and when the interest of the gospel in any place seems greatly declined; the consistent conduct of the few, who adhere to it, will have the happiest effects in promoting a revival.—Finally some persons are harass-

ed with apprehensions of future trials and temptations, or with the dread of death: but let all such trembling believers attend to the apostle's exhortation; and they may rest assured, that the grace of the Lord Jesus will be sufficient for them; and his strength be perfected in their weakness. "For
 " I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor
 " angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things
 " present, nor things to come; nor height, nor
 " depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to se-
 " parate us from the love of God, which is in Christ
 " Jesus our Lord."

Seeing we address ourselves to those only, who expect to be thought Christians; the exhortation may be applicable to every individual. Let a becoming conversation prove that you are Christians in reality. But alas, what gloomy reflections crowd into the mind, when this subject comes in our way! Do the generality of nominal Christians live as becomes the gospel? Is not the conversation of a vast majority diametrically opposite to the spirit and precepts of our holy religion? Who can imagine that Christ will own such men as his true disciples? Who can doubt, but that it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for them?

There are persons, who say, 'When you instruct us in our duty, we regard you: we are not infidels; we have always believed the doctrines of Christianity.' But let me ask you; have these

doctrines properly influenced your heart and life? If they have not; then surely you have believed in vain! You would say to an antinomian professor of justification by faith alone, who lived an immoral life; "Know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead." Beware then lest you slide into antinomianism of a more reputable kind. Faith and practice are not like grapes tied upon a vine-branch; but like grapes growing upon a living vine. True faith receives the doctrines of the gospel into the heart, where they produce a change in the judgment, dispositions, and affections: thus the tree becomes good, and good fruit is the genuine consequence.

This is real Christianity; and all that comes short of this, however distinguished, is a mere name, notion, or form. But if we have thus received the gospel; we shall be conscious, that we have in many things fallen short of a becoming conversation. Let us then humbly seek forgiveness of the past; and beg to be enabled henceforth so to abide in Christ, "that we may bring forth much fruit," "and walk worthy of God, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory." Amen.

SERMON XVI.¹

LUKE, ii. 13, 14.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying; Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.

ST. Paul, having said, “Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh,” adds among other things, that he “was seen of angels.” These heavenly worshippers saw the Lord of glory, their Creator and Sovereign, clothed with human flesh, and laid as an infant in a manger; they saw him tempted by the devil in the wilderness, and ministered to him when he had overcome the enemy; they were spectators of his transfiguration on the mount, and of his agony in the garden; they beheld him expire on the cross; they attended his glorious resurrection

¹ Preached on Christmas Day, 1795.

and ascension; and when he was exalted in human nature to the mediatorial throne, they did him homage, and joined the redeemed in singing, “Wor-
 thy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power,
 and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and ho-
 nour, and glory, and blessing.” For when the
 Father “bringeth in the First begotten into the
 world, he saith, And let all the angels of God
 worship him.” Finally they will be attendant
 and ministering servants, when Christ shall come
 to raise the dead and judge the world

In taking occasion from the present festival to
 discourse on a subject, with which we should be
 conversant at every season of the year, I shall,

I. Make some remarks on the event cele-
 brated by the heavenly host.

II. Explain their song of exalted praise and
 adoration.

III. Endeavour to bring the matter home to
 ourselves by some practical deductions.

And may the Lord himself direct and bless our
 meditations; that we may be animated and assist-
 ed, in “keeping a day unto the Lord,” after a holy
 and heavenly manner; and not in conformity

¹ Rev. v. 9—14.

² Heb. i. 6.

to the corrupt and carnal fashion of those, who turn a Christian solemnity into a bacchanalian carnival!

I. Let us reflect on the event, which was celebrated by the heavenly host.

A poor woman named Mary, of the family of David, espoused to a carpenter residing at Nazareth, a place branded with infamy, came with her husband to Bethlehem, in obedience to a decree of Cæsar Augustus: and there being "no room *for them* in the inn," which was occupied by superior people, they were lodged in a stable. In this situation Mary was delivered of a son, whom she wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.—Nothing at first sight appears remarkable in this event, except the extremely mean and inconvenient accommodation made for the poor woman and her infant; and the unfeeling neglect shewn to a person in her circumstances by the inhabitants of Bethlehem. Indeed the affair seems scarcely to have been noticed in that city: and we do not find that it was heard of at Jerusalem, till the child was presented at the temple according to the law of Moses; when a few persons of eminent piety were made acquainted with it. The rulers, scribes, and priests in general knew nothing of these transactions; till wise men from the east came to enquire

after the new-born King, and to do him homage. Then indeed a considerable degree of attention was excited; and the tyrant Herod caused the infants about Bethlehem to be cruelly murdered, in hopes of destroying one, whom he dreaded as the rival of his authority. Soon after, however, the report seems to have been forgotten. The child born at Bethlehem was brought up at Nazareth with Joseph the carpenter, and doubtless earned his bread at that laborious trade; till at length he entered on his publick ministry, which he closed by an ignominious death upon a cross. Thus “he grew up before the Lord as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground; he had no form or comeliness; and when the people saw him, there was no beauty that they should desire him: he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”¹ And if the Jews knew little of the infant at Bethlehem, and the carpenter’s son at Nazareth; the gentile rulers, conquerors, and philosophers were entirely unacquainted with him. All over the earth, which he came to bless, he was disregarded or despised: yet angels witnessed and celebrated his birth with admiring songs of praise!

These blessed spirits, free from guilt, and perfect in holiness, want not a Saviour. “They excel in strength, and do the Lord’s commandments,

¹ Isa. liii. 2, 3.

“hearkening to the voice of his words.” Their capacities for wisdom and understanding are very great; their judgment and taste, for what is beautiful and glorious, are exactly conformable to those of the holy God whom they adore: and the hope of being at length made like them, and equal to them, should excite a noble ambition and emulation in every human heart. But the event which had taken place at Bethlehem, and which we this day commemorate, appeared to them of the greatest possible importance, and worthy to be celebrated with their most rapturous adorations.

In the infant laid in a manger they recognized the “Seed of the woman,” the spotless offspring of a virgin-mother, who was to come and “bruise the Serpent’s head:” and “the Seed of Abraham, in whom all nations should be blessed.” They knew, that Mary was come to Bethlehem, according to the purpose of God, that the ancient prophecy might be fulfilled. “But thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah; yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”¹ They saw “the Desire of all nations,” actually come;² and they celebrated the accomplishment of Isaiah’s prediction, “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the

¹ Ps. ciii. 20.² Mic. v. 2.³ Hag. ii. 7.

“government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.¹” One of the company therefore said to the poor shepherds, “Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord.” They could not say, “*Unto us* a child is born, *unto us* a Son is given:” “for verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.²” He came into the world to be a Saviour: he was the Christ, the promised Messiah, the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King; yea, he was “The LORD,” “The second man is the LORD from heaven.” “His name is Emmanuel:” for “God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.”

“The WORD, who was in the beginning with God, and who was God, by whom all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made,” “was now made flesh and dwelt among us;” and angels first beheld “his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father.³” They saw him, “who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” “make himself of

¹ Isa. ix. 6. ² Heb. ii. 14—16. ³ John, i. 1—14

“no reputation, take upon him the form of a servant, and the likeness of man; that being found in fashion as a man, he might become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” With astonishment, they witnessed him, “by whom all things were created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; —for whom all things are created;—and by whom all things consist;” they witnessed this glorious Creator and Lord of all “come in the flesh;” that he might be the visible “Image of the invisible God;” and as Head of the church, inherit all things, and have “in all things the pre-eminence: for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.”

Into “these things the angels desire to look:” here they contemplate with fixed attention and unwearied admiration; for they behold “in the church the manifold wisdom of God.” The heavenly host knew who the infant in the manger was, and for what ends he came: they were ready to adore the Child born as the mighty God: they recognized their Creator and Lord, under this disguise; and with good old Simeon they viewed him as “the Light of the gentiles and the Glory of his people Israel.”

In this humble scene they saw the opening of

¹ Phil. ii. 6—8.

² Col. i. 15—19. Heb. i. 1—3.

that grand design, which had been shadowed forth by the ceremonies of the law, and of which the prophets from the beginning had excited the highest expectations: that design which had been obscurely intimated when Adam sinned, and gradually unfolding for about four thousand years. "The great mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh," now actually realized, called forth the amazement, and enlivened the affections of these heavenly worshippers; and dictated that zealous song of adoring praise, which is the subject of our present meditation.

II. Then, we proceed to explain the song itself. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will to men." The angels celebrated the praises of God, and congratulated the happiness of man, with most fervent love and joy. "To you," O ye sons of men, "is born a Saviour, who is Christ, the Lord:" we exult in your felicity, "we rejoice over one sinner that repenteth:" how much greater then, must be our joy and gladness at the nativity of Him who is come to stoop, suffer, and die, that he may "be exalted as a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins?"

It is very affecting to compare the conduct of the heavenly host, in this respect, with that of men in general, who neglect or oppose the message of salvation, and despise the glorious Redeemer. But

angels know our real character and condition: while we are blinded with pride and prejudice, and are extremely unwilling to be convinced that we deserve destruction! or so taken up with “the world, and the things that are in the world,” that we disregard the important interests of eternity!

In considering the hymn of praise before us, we may perhaps begin to best advantage with the concluding sentence, “Good-will to men.”—The blessed angels had witnessed the creation of the earth, “when these morning-stars sang together, “and all the sons of God shouted for joy;”¹ for in that august transaction they saw the immensity of their Creator’s power, wisdom, and goodness. With astonishment and awe they beheld also the fall of their compeers; and when “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment,”² they adored his righteous severity against the rebellious, and his holy abhorrence of sin; and they received instruction of inestimable value from the impressive solemn scene. They saw too the fall of man; and probably expected that vengeance would, with unabated vehemence, seize in like manner upon him; not conceiving that a God of infinite purity and justice could possibly shew mercy and kindness to

¹ Job, xxxviii, 7.

² 2 Pet. ii, 4.

rebels and apostates. No doubt they heard the first intimation of favour to our offending parents, mixed with the solemn denunciation of death, and all the woes that preceded it: and this must have excited a peculiar attention to so new and interesting a discovery of the divine perfections.

From that crisis, they had been witnesses and messengers, both of the Lord's mercy and of his indignation, towards the human race. Numerous opportunities had been afforded them, in the history of mankind, of learning the fatal effects of transgression, and the power of divine wrath. The deluge; the tremendous doom of Sodom and Gomorrah; the desolations of Egypt; the severities inflicted on the devoted Canaanites; the judgments executed even on offending Israel, in the wilderness and Canaan, and by the Babylonish captivity; were so many illustrations of the justice of God, and his holy abhorrence of iniquity. But at the same time his patience and bounty towards sinful men, his gracious interpositions in behalf of his people, the intimations and predictions of a Saviour, the promises given to believers, and the actual salvation of numbers, shewed his good-will to mankind; and his readiness to pity, help, and relieve them, as far as could consist with the honour of his name, and the interest of his universal and everlasting kingdom.

Yet in the infant lying in the manger at Bethlehem, the angels had such a discovery of the Lord's

good-will to men, connected with his detestation of their sins, as had never hitherto attracted their notice or raised their expectations. They no doubt, before this, had some general conception of the plan formed by infinite wisdom and everlasting love: perhaps the whole had been fully notified to them. Yet when the stupendous design was thus far accomplished; their previous admiration of the ineffable condescension, compassion, and love of the holy and glorious Lord God towards lost sinners, whose multiplied and heinous crimes had so long called loudly for vengeance, was far exceeded, and as it were swallowed up in inexpressible astonishment. Good-will to man! to guilty, polluted, ungrateful man! to idolatrous, impious, and blaspheming man! This overwhelmed the blessed angels with amazement, and tuned their hearts to adoring praises: and these reflections must have the same effect on all, who have just views of the majesty and glorious holiness of God, the nature and desert of sin, and the wonderful plan of redemption.—“God commendeth his love to us in
 “that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”
 “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that
 “he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitia-
 “tion for our sins.”

This good-will of God to men is mere compassion and benevolence, not approbation or com-

¹ Rom. v. 6—10. 1 John, iv. 10.

placency. The crimes, dispositions, and characters of the creatures, thus beloved, were unspeakably hateful in his holy eyes: and none of his protestations against sin are so decided and energetick, as that which principally declares his love to sinners. The compassion and tenderness, which induce virtuous and pious persons, at great expence, to relieve those pitiable objects whose crimes have rendered them miserable; in order that an attempt may be made to rescue them from temporal and eternal ruin, is a very distant imitation of the love shewn by our God to sinners, in giving his Son to be their Saviour, even while he declares them to be deserving of his everlasting wrath and abhorrence. The heinousness of our crimes, the contrariety of our dispositions to the divine purity, the great things he hath done to make way for our salvation, and the inestimable blessings prepared for us, combine to illustrate the riches of his mercy and the immensity of his goodness. The love of the Father, in giving his only-begotten and well-beloved Son; the love of the Son in most willingly assuming our nature, that he might give himself a sacrifice for our sins; and the love of the Spirit, in preparing our hearts to receive this salvation, and in making us meet for the heavenly inheritance, demand our warmest gratitude and most fervent praises; while we give "glory to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit," into whose name we were baptized,

Before the coming of Christ, the special tokens of the Lord's good-will to men were principally confined to the people of Israel; and he had suffered all other nations to walk in their own ways. But in the child born at Bethlehem the angels saw him, who was appointed for "Salvation to the ends of the earth." The partition-wall was about to be removed; the good tidings of a Saviour, even Christ the Lord, were speedily to be proclaimed to all people without distinction; and thus a proposal of mercy and every blessing, "without money and "without price," would be made to persons of all characters and descriptions, not excepting the vilest. Nay, all men every where would be commanded to repent: and the ambassadors of Christ would, in his stead, and as if God besought them by their mouth, beseech them to be reconciled to God. The fullest assurances were thus about to be given, that the loving Saviour would reject none, on any account whatever, who came to him for life and godliness; and exceedingly great and precious promises, together with the institution of sacred ordinances as *means of grace*, would concur in encouraging sinners of every nation to seek the blessings of eternal life, without fearing a denial or disappointment.—All this doubtless and far more was perceived by the heavenly host, when they proclaimed "Good-will to men," in celebrating the nativity of our Emmanuel!

They sang also "Peace on earth." They had witnessed the fatal effects of the creature's venturing to oppose the Creator's will, and become his enemies. They had seen angels, as it were, declare war against the Almighty; and even when cast out of heaven, employing all their liberty in carrying on the same desperate and ruinous hostilities. They beheld man seduced to join the apostate rebels, and become enemies to God by wicked works; and then, instigated by enmity to increasing iniquity. The earth filled with tears, groans, and miseries; the universal victory and triumph of death and the grave, and the subsequent doom of impenitent and unreconciled sinners, were the consequences which angels had witnessed of man's infatuated contest against his omnipotent Creator. — They had been spectators likewise of all the cruel wars, which men in every age had waged against each other: and of all the dire effects of ambition, envy, revenge, and insatiable rapacity or cruelty, from the day when Cain, the first murderer, embued his hands in his brother's blood, What then must have been the sentiments and feelings of these benevolent spirits, while witnessing the murders, massacres, battles, sieges, and persecutions, which have wasted the human species, and increased the miseries of the world to a degree that exceeds all calculation? What did they think of the lavish encomiums, bestowed, almost unanimously, on the most skillful, prosperous,

and unfeeling of these butchers of mankind? What estimate did they form of man's heart, and of the vaunted dignity of human nature, the milk of human kindness, and the sufficiency of reason to guide us to virtue and happiness? Beholding incessantly these horrid spectacles, what could holy angels think of man, but that he was, as it were, a younger brother of the original murderer, delighting in the same work, and deeming no other employment so honourable? What could they think of the earth, but that it was in many respects a counterpart of hell; and that it would have been so more entirely, had it not been for the goodwill of God to men?

I mean not, my brethren, to declaim against the profession of arms, or to condemn all rulers and nations that engage in war. Some soldiers have been, and some are, Christians: but their profession is their cross, and its duties their self-denial; they would not willingly engage in any war of ambition, rapacity, or revenge; but they readily face danger, and endure hardship, in defence of their country. The more we hate war and long for peace, the greater are our obligations to such men, as thus expose themselves to guard us against injurious assailants; and the more fervently we ought to pray for their protection and success. In the present state of the world, war is a necessary evil, and often quite unavoidable: and that not merely when a nation is directly

attacked; for there are many other ways, by which the rapacious and ambitious may render a neighbouring country incapable of defending its liberties and possessions; and these can only be counteracted by vigorous opposition. Nor are private individuals generally competent to decide what wars are necessary and justifiable, or the contrary: in this respect rulers must give an account to God for their conduct. But wars proceed originally from the lusts of men's hearts,¹ and from the wicked one: God employs them, as he does hurricanes, earthquakes, or pestilences, as executioners of his vengeance on guilty nations: and *ambitious* conquerors, however accomplished or illustrious, are the most hateful and tremendous scourges of our apostate race. We may therefore deprecate and denounce war itself, as the most horrid and atrocious evil, consistently with the obedience and honour due to our rulers, and the most sincere prayers for the success of their measures, as far as they tend to the protection and welfare of our beloved country. But we must also maintain, that all the blood shed in war is *murder*, chargeable on them, whose criminal projects and politicks render such dreadful methods of resisting them necessary; and that it will certainly be required at *their* hands, on which side soever the victims were slaughtered.

¹ James, iv. 1.

But to return from this digression ; when Christ was born, angels sang, "Peace on earth." Peace between God and sinners; peace between a man and his neighbour; peace between contending nations; peace in heart and conscience; and peace throughout the earth. The Saviour is "the Prince of peace;" the true "Melchisedeck king of Salem, the King of righteousness and the King of peace:" "and of his government and peace there shall be no end." The gospel is "the word of reconciliation," ministers are ambassadors of peace, through the great Mediator between God and man. Into whatever house the apostles entered, they were directed to say "Peace be to this house:" and wherever we are sent, we go "preaching peace by Jesus Christ." "He is our Peace, he hath made peace by the blood of his cross;" and he hath pronounced a blessing on "peace-makers, as the children of God."

When we embrace his gospel, "being justified by faith we have peace with God;" he imputes not to us our trespasses, but admits us into a state of reconciliation, and a covenant of friendship with himself; and, by the Spirit of sanctification and adoption, teaches and inclines us cordially to love him, and delight in his perfections, service, and salvation. Peace is the legacy Christ hath left his disciples, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth,

“give I unto you.”¹ When our hearts are stayed on the Lord in faith and hope, he “keeps them in perfect peace,” and he imparts a “peace of God which passeth all understanding,” to possess and confirm “our hearts and minds by Christ Jesus.” A stable peace of conscience, in reliance on the immense and everlasting mercy of God, through the all-sufficient atonement and mediation of Christ; which will bear investigation, and flourish in connexion with deep humility, holy abhorrence of sin, and the strictest conscientiousness in all things; and an inward serenity and tranquillity of mind, in submission to the will of God and confidence in him, constitute this inestimable blessing.

The Lord hath also assured us, that “when our ways please him, he maketh even our enemies to be at peace with us:” and his peace ruling in our hearts disposes us to follow peace with all men. The precepts, as well as the promises of Christ, ensure peace to all his true disciples. The most sincere, upright, disinterested, and harmless conduct, united with tender compassion, courteousness, and universal benevolence; a disposition to make concessions and reparations for all injuries, and to forgive and love our enemies in the most unwearied and generous manner, are expressly commanded by the Redeemer; and these are also “the fruits of the Spirit,” who dwells in all true believers. The most exact attention to all

¹ John, xiv. 27.

relative duties, according to the regular subordination of families and communities, is also effectually provided for. If therefore, all men should at once be made true Christians, answerable to the specimen shewn to the world after the day of Pentecost; nay, according to that lower measure of grace bestowed on thousands in this land at present: the effect upon human affairs would be as stupendous, as that produced on the boisterous winds and stormy waves, when the incarnate Son of God said, "Peace, be still, and there was a great calm!" Wars and all concurrent and similar evils must instantaneously cease; and peace, equity, purity, truth, and love universally prevail; if all men were partakers of the Spirit of Christ, and obedient to his commandments.

But hath not he said, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you nay; but rather division: for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.¹" To this it may be answered, that predictions of future events must be distinguished from commands, exhortations, and doctrines: and the latter, not the former, shew the real nature and tendency of the gospel. When a few persons are converted, and feel their obligations to love Christ more than father or mother, and to obey God rather than man; and yet many

¹ Luke, xii. 51—53.

remain under the influence of "that spirit who worketh in the children of disobedience:" divisions will necessarily be the consequence. And when the mad passions of ungodly men take occasion, from Christianity, to vent themselves; and the distinction, between real believers, and nominal Christians, is overlooked: the tendency of the gospel must be mistaken. The opposition which the religion of Jesus has met with from the world; the wickedness that men have committed, under the guise of Christianity; and the inconsistencies and indiscretions of many pious persons, have produced lamentable effects. Hence persecutions and religious wars have been excited, by the professed disciples of the Prince of peace! *Pious*, or rather *impious*, frauds have been practised to subserve the cause of superstition or hypocrisy! Acrimonious controversies and divisions among professed Christians have been multiplied; and even serious persons have been prejudiced against each other by a narrow and absurd bigotry. "Woe be to the world because of offences! it must needs be that offences come; but woe be to that man by whom they come!"

We must not, however, ascribe these things to Christianity, but to the want of it. If men were *real* Christians most of these evils would cease, and all of them would be mitigated: if men were consistent and judicious Christians, they would totally vanish. Even disciples too often "know

“not what spirit they are of;” and contend for the truths and ordinances of Christ, in a manner contrary to his precepts and example.

But it may also be observed, that all these effects spring from the depravity of the human heart as their native source; and if men had not this occasion of discord and selfishness, they would find some other. After all, the world has seldom been more wicked, in the worst ages and places distinguished by the Christian name, than at other times and in other countries: though unbelievers have bestowed more pains in exhibiting its wickedness. In general, the state of human society has been greatly meliorated by the gospel: for where have Christians habitually diverted themselves by such bloody spectacles, as the gladiatorial shows of the Romans? Where have pagans manifested such humanity to the poor, sick, and destitute; as is displayed in the expensive institutions common in Christian countries? Vices, branded with deepest infamy even in this licentious age, were patronized and avowed among the politest heathens. War itself has assumed a milder aspect since the establishment of Christianity: and even Deists have learned from the sacred oracles, to denounce ambitious warriors; and to give the palm of glory to those who save men's lives, instead of those that destroy them. These effects have evidently been produced by the gospel, even on the

minds of multitudes, who never believed it with a living and obedient faith.

Taking, however, our standard of Christianity from the scriptures; we are confident, that in proportion as it prevails, it will produce "peace on earth," in all senses and in all places. We are also assured, that ere long the Prince of peace will possess the dominion over all nations as his willing subjects: and then they will beat their swords into plow-shares and learn war no more. Well, therefore, might angels sing at the Redeemer's nativity, "Peace on earth!" A blessing inestimable in itself, long unknown, or scarcely known, among men: but now about to be vouchsafed by a gradual progress to all the nations of the globe.

For such blessings virtually communicated to sinful men in the person of Emmanuel, angels also ascribed "Glory to God in the highest."—The perfections of God are his essential glory, which is incapable of increase or diminution: but in his works he manifests this glory to his rational creatures, that they may contemplate, admire, and adore it; and he is glorified by them, when they delight to celebrate his praises. "The heavens declare the glory of God:" and his eternal power and Deity are clearly seen in all the works which he made. His providential care of the universe manifests his wisdom, goodness, and bounty: his

awful justice and holiness are displayed in his perfect law and righteous judgments, and his patience and kindness, even to sinners, may be learned from his dealings with our fallen race in general. These glories the heavenly host had witnessed and celebrated for four thousand years.

But the birth of the infant in the stable, viewed in its causes and consequences, discovered to them glories so resplendent, that in some respects they eclipsed all former displays; and with rapturous joy and admiration they sang "Glory to God in the highest:" in the highest heavens among all its exalted inhabitants, and in the loftiest strains, which they can possibly reach. Here the glories of the divine justice, holiness, truth, wisdom, knowledge, power, love, and mercy, which they had viewed separately in other objects, shone forth with collected beams in most adorable beauty and splendour. The perfections, which before appeared irreconcilable, now harmonized, and reflected glory upon each other. The distinct honours of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, were displayed at once to their admiring view. And as they were always ready, with glowing love, zeal, and gratitude, to celebrate the high praises of God: so they were peculiarly excited to this reasonable and delightful service, on this interesting occasion. Never did JEHOVAH appear in all respects so glorious in holiness, justice, truth, and wisdom, as in his wonderful love to Adam's guilty polluted race.

If God so hates sin, that his well-beloved Son shall become man and bear the curse, rather than it shall go unpunished; and yet so loves sinners, as to employ such an expedient, rather than leave them to perish without remedy: if his wisdom could form such a plan of reconciling justice and mercy, and of taking occasion from sin itself to glorify his name in the most distinguished manner: and if his faithfulness accomplishes such a promise, as that relating to the incarnation of his own Son for these most gracious purposes: how transcendently glorious must He be! How worthy of universal love and adoration! Let all creatures then say “Glory to God in the highest!”

Angels “rejoice over one sinner that repenteth:” because every event of this nature is a new display of the divine glory in the work of redemption; a new trophy of the Redeemer’s beneficent victories; a new worshipper to join the heavenly choir to all eternity; and a new instrument to excite other sinners to seek for the same blessings.—For alas! men are blind, wilfully blind, to the glory of God in all respects. Even the displays of his being and perfections in the works of creation fail of suitably affecting their hearts; “They glorify him not as God, neither are thankful.” But the gospel, professed, adorned, and preached in the world, calls their attention to an interesting subject: and when “God who commandeth the light to shine out of darkness, shines into our

“ hearts to give the light of the knowledge of his
“ glory in the face of Jesus Christ,¹” that light is
reflected, as it were, on every other object; and we
learn by degrees to glorify God, for all the dis-
plays he hath made of himself; and as a “ spiritual
“ priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices accep-
“ table to God through Jesus Christ.” Thus sin-
ners on earth are trained up for the worship of
heaven; of which the highest and most delightful
strain will be, “ Worthy is the Lamb that was
“ slain, and hath redeemed us to God with his
“ blood;” “ Salvation to our God that sitteth on
“ the throne, and unto the Lamb.” Hallelujah.
“ Amen.—The adoring praises of the heavenly
“ host may therefore be also considered, as an af-
“ fectionate expression of their longing desire, that
by the gospel of Christ, the divine glory might fill
the earth as well as heaven; while peace with God
and with each other should be enjoyed by all its
inhabitants, through the adorable good-will shewn
to guilty man.

III. Then, let us endeavour to bring this
matter home to ourselves by some practical de-
ductions.

We may learn from this subject how insignifi-
cant all earthly distinctions are, in the judgment

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 4—6.

of the heavenly host. They see no glory in them, nor dishonour in the want of them. The Lord of all descends to dwell on earth, to be a Prince and Saviour: and angels celebrate the august event, the most important that had ever occurred from the beginning of the world. But he appears not in an imperial palace, or with the appendages of royalty; but in a stable, and laid in a manger! And let us not forget, that this was the settled purpose of unchangeable wisdom and everlasting love; in order to pour contempt on all that splendour, which we are prone to idolize.

Not only are *vanity and vexation* inscribed on the pomp, wealth, and luxuries of the world, by this remarkable appointment; but they are pronounced mean, ensnaring, and polluting. We should therefore enquire, how far our judgment coincides, in this respect, with that of angels and the Lord of angels? The rich and noble should remember that their distinctions are as withering flowers; at the same time that they are talents entrusted to their stewardship, of which a strict account will shortly be demanded. Let them not then “be high-minded, or trust in uncertain riches, “but in the living God.” “Let not the wise “man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty “man glory in his might, let not the rich man “glory in his riches.” Yea, “God forbid that” any of us “should glory, save in the cross of our “Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified

“to us, and we unto the world.¹” We should well consider the words of the apostle, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted; but the rich in that he is made low.²”—“Mind not then,” my brethren, “high things, but condescend to men of low estate:” cultivate humility, courteousness, indifference about the world, and self-denying beneficence, in the midst of abundance: this will abate envy, secure you from the snares and perils of your situation, and render the talents entrusted to you a blessing to many, and more abundantly to yourselves.—“How hardly,” says our Lord, “shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” But “the things that are impossible with men are possible with him.” Yet this consideration, should excite in you peculiar caution, watchfulness, and prayer, that your riches may not prove the ruin of your immortal souls.

Think, my brethren, of the stable, the carpenter’s shop, the feast on barley-bread and small fishes, the well in Samaria, and of him who had not where to lay his head: that you may learn not to despise the poor, lest you reproach your Maker and disdain the Saviour of the world. Heavenly glory and excellency may be clad in coarse raiment, or lodged in a mean cottage. Learn not to judge of men by outward appearance; but to esti-

¹ Jer. ix. 23, 24. Gal. vi. 14.

² James, i. 9—11.

mate characters according to their intrinsick worth: and let it not be thought any disparagement to prefer the company of pious Christians, who are almost as poor as their Master chose to be, above that of the most accomplished persons who are strangers to his saving grace.

And, my brethren of low degree, let me exhort you to be contented and patient in your humble condition: watch against envy, repining, coveting, and distrust. Seek the true riches, “the ornament which in the sight of God is of great price,” the “honour that cometh from him,” and the pure pleasures which he bestows. With these, the meanest accommodations will make your hearts thankful: and if your children be poorly provided for, and you are overlooked in times of difficulty by your neighbours; think of the virgin-mother and her holy infant in the stable; reflect on your sinfulness; and instead of murmuring, lift up your hearts in joyful thanksgivings: for few of you are so poor as the divine Saviour of sinners was, during the whole of his humiliation.

But, my friends, what do you think of this lowly Redeemer? Do your ideas of his dignity, excellency, love, and salvation, accord to the views of these holy angels? Or do you see in him no form or comeliness; nor any beauty for which you should desire him? Do you heartily sing “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good-will towards men?” Or is there

nothing in this great event to excite your attention and admiration? You can never be meet for the joys of heaven, unless you learn on earth to see and admire the glories of redeeming love. The songs of angels would grate in your ears, and discompose your hearts; were it possible for you to enter the mansions of the blessed, without having felt your need of a Saviour, and acquired a disposition to love and adore him. And how will the conduct of angels, who, though they never sinned, and need no pardoning mercy or renewing grace, yet glorify God with all their powers for his love to fallen men, rise up in judgment against the ingratitude and perverseness of perishing sinners; who make the very condescension of Emmanuel the pretence for refusing him the glory due unto his name.

Let us also enquire, how far we resemble these heavenly worshippers in the temper of our minds. Exalted and holy as they are, they despise not sinful worms, dwelling in houses of clay; while they adored the Son of God, as tabernacling in human flesh, and thus “made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death.” They complain not of the special honour shewn to worthless man, by this union of the Deity with our nature, not with their’s: they are not reluctant to our felicity, and object not to our being made equal with them. Yea, they willingly and joyfully minister to the heirs of salvation, in the meanest cottage, work-house,

or dungeon; nor do they deem the poorest believer an unmeet object of their condescending and compassionate services.—This is genuine excellency: but have we been taught to resemble and imitate them? Are we thus attentive to the needy, ready to sympathize with the afflicted, and freed from selfishness, envy, and contempt of inferiors?—Above all, let us remember and imitate “the grace of the Lord Jesus, who though he was “rich, for our sakes became poor; that we, through “his poverty might be made rich.” He hath said, “The poor ye have always with you; and “when ye will ye may do good to them.” He hath appointed his needy disciples to be his representatives and receivers; that in supplying their wants we may express our love and gratitude to him, and copy his most endearing example.

This season is generally attended with an interruption of secular business, and some additional expence: yet the time and money are generally worse than thrown away, while professed Christians, like Israel worshipping the golden calf, “sit “down to eat and drink, and rise up to play.” But if we have a spiritual taste, and judge as angels do; we shall rather abridge ourselves of customary indulgences, than “make provision for the flesh,” when commemorating the humble birth of the self-denying Saviour. We shall express our joy,

and employ our leisure, in acts of solemn worship and grateful praises: and instead of expensive feasts for the wealthy; we shall abound in hospitality and kindness to the poor, and be glad to contribute to promote the cause, for which the Son of God became incarnate.

The sensual and ungodly mirth of vast multitudes, at this festival, is madness. They abound in the works of the devil, because the Son of God was manifested to destroy them! when the very event thus commemorated will increase the weight of their condemnation, unless they can be persuaded to follow the apostle's counsel; "Cleanse
" your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts,
" ye double-minded; be afflicted, and mourn, and
" weep; let your laughter be turned into mourn-
" ing, and your joy into heaviness. Humble
" yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall
" lift you up."¹

But "let the heart of those rejoice that seek the
" Lord." Let the poor in spirit, the weeping penitent take encouragement, from the astonishing instance of the Lord's good-will to sinful men, this day commemorated. And let all, that have tasted this grace, and can rejoice in the love of God our Saviour, remember that they are subjects to the Prince of peace; that they may be animated, to

¹ Jam. iv. 7—10.

pray for universal peace, and by all suitable means, to follow after peace, to seek the peace of the church, and the peace of the world; and “by well doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

SERMON XVII.¹

I SAMUEL, vii. 12.

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hithertohath the LORD helped us.

FROM the calling of Abraham to the time of Samuel, the Lord had shewn peculiar favours of inestimable value to his chosen people. Especially
“ He shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes
“ and his judgments unto Israel: he dealt not so
“ with any nation, and as for his judgments they
“ had not known them.”² But they had always manifested a perverse and ungrateful disposition, and were continually provoking him with their idolatries and rebellions.—“ Therefore was the
“ wrath of the LORD kindled against his people,
“ insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance:
“ and he gave them into the hand of the heathen;

¹ Preached January 1, 1796.

² Ps. cxlvii, 19, 20.

“ and they that hated them ruled over them. Their
“ enemies also oppressed them, and they were
“ brought in subjection under their hand. Many
“ times did he deliver them ; but they provoked
“ him by their counsel, and were brought low for
“ their iniquity. Nevertheless he regarded their
“ affliction, when he heard their cry.¹”

Hophni and Phinehas, the priests, the sons of Eli, had by their wickedness caused a most deplorable prevalence of impiety among the people : this provoked God to deliver them into the hands of the Philistines, who triumphantly carried off the ark of the covenant, which had been presumptuously brought into the field of battle. For the Lord was able to vindicate his own glory, and to honour that symbol of his gracious presence even among his avowed enemies, without countenancing the vain confidence of his hypocritical worshippers. The Philistines were soon constrained to restore the ark ; but while it was neglected in Israel, they retained their superiority. During the space of twenty years, Samuel, who at the beginning of these troubles was very young, seems to have laboured with zealous and unwearyed diligence, in bringing the people to repentance, and reviving true religion. At the end of this time it is said, “ All the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.” The narrative of

¹ Ps. cvi. 40—44.

the subsequent reformation is indeed very brief; yet there is reason to conclude, that it was one of the most signal revivals of vital godliness, that stands upon record: for “the children of Israel
“ did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served
“ the LORD only.”

A general assembly being convened at Mizpeh, where Samuel was publickly owned as judge of Israel: while they were earnestly seeking the Lord with fasting, prayer, and other religious observances; the Philistines, jealous of their proceedings, marched directly to attack them. But, in answer to the earnest prayers of Samuel and the people, these formidable enemies were entirely defeated. And on this memorable occasion, “Samuel took
“ a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen,
“ and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying,
“ Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.” He set up a monument of God’s kindness to Israel, (not of Israel’s triumph over the Philistines;) to perpetuate the memory of his gracious interposition in their behalf, and to declare their gratitude, to future generations.

The history of Israel may be considered as God’s experimental trial of human nature. The experiments of the Chemist on an ounce of gold or mercury, when properly repeated and established, authorize general conclusions concerning the properties of all the gold or mercury in the world. Thus the dealings of the Lord with Israel, as a

specimen of the human race, when rightly understood, warrant general conclusions concerning the dispositions and propensities of all mankind: for the whole is, as it were, one mass, and has the same nature and properties. It is therefore mere self-flattery to suppose, that we should have acted better than they did, if we had been left to ourselves in exactly the same circumstances: and it is a vulgar prejudice to imagine that the Israelites were more wicked than other nations. Their history was more impartially written, and their conduct tried by a stricter rule: in all other respects the records of any country tend to establish the same conclusions concerning human nature.

The history of the visible church in every age entirely coincides with that of the Israelites: special mercies conferred; base ingratitude and rebellion; severe chastisements and the triumph of cruel enemies; humiliation and revivals of religion, followed by gracious providential deliverances, form the compendium of the whole: but “Hitherto hath the LORD helped us,” and “the gates of hell have not prevailed.”—The experience likewise of believers harmonizes in many respects with the records of Israel: and it is peculiarly useful, frequently to review with care and attention, all the Lord’s dealings with us, and our conduct towards him: “For hitherto hath he “helped us.”—To assist such a review, at the entrance of another year, will be the object of the

present discourse; in which I shall consider and illustrate,

I. The import of the words “Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.”

II. Enquire what is meant by “Setting up an Eben-ezer,” according to the common, and not improper, use of the expression.

I. The import of the words, “Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.”

1. The Lord hath hitherto helped us all, in his superintending providence. We came into the world indigent and helpless: our wants were numerous and urgent, and we were utterly incapable of making any provision for them. All these wants the Lord alone supplied; and others were merely the instruments by which he conferred his bounty. Numbers die in infancy, because they are not properly taken care of and provided for: but we were preserved; and in the kindness and ability of parents or friends supplying our wants, we experienced, and should acknowledge, the distinguishing goodness of God. The use of our limbs, senses, and faculties; the measure of our natural abilities; and the advantages of our education, by which we were severally brought into our present comfortable way of subsistence: as

well as our possessions, with all that distinguishes every one's situation in society from that of others, should be traced back to the special kindness of the Lord. We should each of us remember, with good old Jacob, that "God hath fed us all our life long unto this day." He hath given us our temporal provision, whatever it hath been; and if we have lived thirty, forty, fifty, or more years, without experiencing the want of food or the other necessaries of life; we have abundant reason to say, "Hitherto hath the LORD helped us. This has laid us under as deep obligations to gratitude, as if we had been fed by miracle, according to the kindness of the Lord to Israel: and in some respects we have had a decided advantage over them; for our supply has been more pleasant, in it's nature and variety, than manna from the clouds and water from the rock would have been. "The earth is the LORD's and the fulness of it." "He openeth his hand and filleth all things living with plenteousness;" and he hath put it in our power to obtain a portion of his bounty.

Nor have our *dangers* been fewer than our *wants*. What multitudes are swept away by various sicknesses and disasters, in every stage of human life, even from the earliest infancy! How

¹ Gen. xlviii. 15.

many have all their days embittered by perpetual disease ! What frequent instances do we witness of such as have been deprived of their limbs or senses ; or even rendered most pitiable objects by incurable insanity ! If then we have been favoured with a comfortable state of health ; if violent maladies have not seized on us, or have been removed ; if the use of our eyes, ears, senses, limbs, and understandings have been continued, or restored to us ; whatever second causes have concurred, we should thankfully say, “ Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.”

Our lives and comforts are likewise exposed to perpetual dangers from wicked men. If then we have lain down in peace, one night after another, and risen in safety ; if we or our dear friends have journeyed from time to time, without having been injured or even alarmed by robbers and murderers : or if, to shew us our danger, and remind us of our invisible Protector ; we have been alarmed, and yet preserved from material detriment, how ought we to bless and praise the Lord for his peculiar kindness to us ! Every time that we have gone from home, by land or sea ; or have parted with our beloved relatives, thus called into distant parts ; and on our return have met them in safety, without having experienced fatal disasters, or heart-rending distresses, should excite us to renew our grateful acknowledgements to the God of our lives.

Some of us can say, 'We were never, during all our past years, disturbed by the midnight alarm of fire in our habitations; our property, or part of our families were never thus tremendously taken from us.' Others may indeed have been thus alarmed, and endangered; but were mercifully preserved, and extricated from the difficulties in which they were involved. And have we not, my friends, abundant cause for gratitude to our kind Protector and Deliverer?

Let us not on this occasion forget the special mercies we enjoy in this favoured land. The nation has indeed, within our days, been frequently engaged in war, and great complaints have been made: but few of us know any thing experimentally of the horrors attending on actual warfare. We have not been shut up in besieged cities, nor witnessed the dismay, carnage, and devastation of such a scene. Streets flowing with human blood, or strewed with mangled corpses; the groans of the wounded and dying; the ruins or smoke of houses made the graves of the inhabitants; with all the dire effects of places taken by assault, and given up to plunder and massacre, have not been rendered familiar to our senses. We have not beheld the fields ravaged by hostile armies, the labour of the husbandmen destroyed; towns and villages reduced to ashes; and the neighbourhood rendered almost a desert; except

as the engines of destruction, the conflicting armies, the moans of the dying, or the more affecting lamentations of surviving parents, widows, and orphans, give a sad variety to the dreary scene. How few comparatively of the human race have passed so large a portion of their lives, without sharing these sorrows, or having their hearts pained by these woeful spectacles! Is there then no cause on this account to set up our Eben-ezer, and say, "Hitherto hath the LORD helped us?" If any doubt of it; a few months' residence in a country that is made the seat of war would effectually teach them (provided they be peaceably disposed) to value a land of peace; and to be thankful, if henceforth they may know nothing of war, except from newspapers and taxes.—Many apprehensions have lately been entertained in our land on this account; but during another year we have been preserved. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

The same may likewise be observed concerning pestilences, earthquakes, hurricanes, famines, and other dreadful scourges of a guilty world. We have thus far been exempted from them; and our fears of these dire judgments, which desolate other cities and countries, with complicated miseries that baffle all description, should excite us to bless God, who hath hitherto distinguished us by his special protection.

It would occupy too much time, and prove tedious, to enter into further particulars of the deliverances, comforts, and mercies, which a kind Providence hath vouchsafed us. This specimen may suffice to aid the serious enquirer in recollecting the peculiar favours, that he has received during his past life: and this may prove one of the most useful studies in which he can engage.—It may, however, be proper to ask, whether there has not been some peculiar trial, which you have dreaded more than any other? Now, if you have either been preserved from this; or have, beyond expectation, been supported and carried through it; you can scarcely help considering this as a powerful call on you to say with gratitude, “Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.”

But it behoves us also to enquire, in what manner we have received the blessings of a kind Providence, and what returns we have made for them? Alas, we have generally the utmost reason to confess our ungrateful forgetfulness of our Benefactor, our disposition to abuse or idolize his gifts; to undervalue them because not answerable to our exorbitant desires; to ascribe our safety and success to our own prudence and good conduct; or to spend our abundance in gratifying our carnal passions! This subject therefore, if investigated with care, may probably convince us, that we have great cause to admire the Lord’s goodness, in pre-

·serving us from *ourselves*, and the consequences of our own vices and follies. If we had been left without restraint, we might, either directly or by excesses, have long since proved our own murderers: we might have been hurried on, by violent passion or resentment, or in prosecution of some favorite project, to murder others, or have provoked them to murder us. We might in various ways have exposed ourselves to the sword of human vengeance: and it is indeed wonderful that God hath born with our rebellion and perverseness, and hath not cut us off in the midst of our sins. “It is of the LORD’s mercies that “we are not consumed, because his compassions “fail not.” We are infinitely indebted to his patience and long-suffering. He spared, protected, and provided for many of us, during a number of years, when we neither asked him to do it, nor thanked him for his kindness. While multitudes were perishing around us, and several of our companions in ungodliness were cut off; while we sinned on amidst repeated warnings and narrow escapes; our offended God would neither destroy us, nor permit others to do it: nay, he prevented the fatal effects of our own madness and folly, and over-ruled many instances of it for our good. Thus he gave us space for repentance: his providential dealings with us had a tendency to excite our attention, and lead us to consider our ways: and every true penitent will perceive that they

were actually designed to effect the most gracious purposes. We have been spared by the forbearance of our God, that we might be saved by his mercy!

2. God hath hitherto helped *believers* by his special grace.

Ages before we were brought into existence, He foresaw our wants and miseries, as the descendants of fallen Adam; “by whom sin entered into the world, and death by sin:” and in infinite mercy he had made all things ready for our salvation, in the person and redemption of his beloved Son. In due season he blessed the land, which was destined to be our residence, with the light of the gospel; and by a variety of wonderful interpositions he hath continued to it that light, while it hath been extinguished or greatly obscured in other lands. When we found our lot cast in a country thus distinguished; we had, perhaps for a long time, no disposition to attend to the word of salvation; but lived, carelessly or by choice, in Egyptian darkness on the very verge of Goshen. At length we were brought to hear the gospel, by events and circumstances in which we had no willing concurrence, or at least no intention of enquiring the way of life. Many have said, “I will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy, and sell, and get gain.” Or ‘I will

‘ go, and take my fill of pleasure and diversion
‘ with my friends and companions:’ but they have
been disappointed of their aim; and in the very
place of their purposed indulgence, gain, or pre-
ferment, have been induced to hear the word of
God, and been made partakers of blessings inesti-
mably precious. Thus the case of Saul, who went
to seek the asses, but found them not, yet met
with Samuel, and was anointed king of Israel, has
been far exceeded. Secular inducements have led
others to remove to places favoured with the faith-
ful preaching of God’s word, without the least
intention of regarding it: but after a while, curi-
osity, or persuasion, or some other motive, induced
them to give it a hearing, and thus they were
made wise unto eternal life. Some, having resided
a long time in a situation where little regard was
paid to religion, they were at length excited to
resist, with all their influence, the introduction of
another kind of preaching, and were much cha-
grined at not being able to carry the point: yet
afterwards attachment to a customary place of
worship, or some motive of conveniency, brought
them to hear the new doctrine, even the doctrine
of Christ crucified; and at length a total change
in their views, dispositions, and conduct has filled
them with admiring gratitude, and dictated most
fervent praises to the Lord. Nay, in some in-
stances, a man’s gross misconduct has proved the
occasion of bringing him to hear the word of life

to the salvation of his soul ! Thus Onesimus, dishonestly leaving his master Philemon, fled to Rome, where the ministry of Paul was blessed to his conversion, and he became, as it is generally supposed, an able pastor of the Christian church: and thus, I trust, several, whose vices were the cause of their seeking admission into this hospital,¹ have here been brought to repentance, faith in Christ, and newness of life; and will admire to all eternity the manifold wisdom and inexpressible mercy of God to them, in this gracious dispensation.

In these, and numberless other ways, the Lord is “found of them that sought him not, and made “manifest to them that enquired not after him.²” And the hints now offered may assist the serious Christian, in recollecting the peculiar means, by which God first “opened his eyes, and turned him “from darkness to light, and from the power of “Satan to God.”

We should however, observe, that numbers have been favoured with the same means, who never obtained the same blessing. It occurs therefore to enquire, “Who made thee to differ from another?” Some of us are conscious, that when we first heard or read the doctrine of Christ, which now is “all “our salvation, and all our desire,” we treated it, not merely with indifference, but with decided

¹ The Lock Hospital.

² Rom. x. 20.

contempt and aversion. Nay, we opposed and reasoned against it with all our ability, calumniating or ridiculing those who held it. We can remember how strenuously we endeavoured to silence our convictions, and to answer the arguments which almost prevailed over our prejudices: how we tried to quiet our minds, either by reflecting on our supposed virtue; by growing more punctual in a task of religion; or by listening to our own self-complacency and the flattery of our friends, in respect of the imagined superiority of our talents. When baffled on these grounds, we can recollect how we attempted to elude the conviction, by listening to disadvantageous reports concerning those reputedly *enthusiastical* teachers, who maintained the humiliating doctrines of grace; and by charging their principles, on some occasions, with tending to licentiousness, on others, by blaming them as too precise and rigorous in their requirements and example! Nay, perhaps some present, when all these methods failed, have tried to forget the whole in the hurry of business, a succession of company and dissipation, an excess of riot, or even a close application to study. Indeed it would not be wonderful, if some individuals should be conscious, that after all other attempts to quiet their consciences, they have at last had recourse to an antinomian or *enthusiastical* abuse of the gospel, as the last and most desperate expedient for keeping upon good

terms with themselves, without parting with their worldly idols.

Not one of these ways of eluding conviction can be mentioned, which hath not been tried by one or another; not one of these snares, in which some of us have not been successively entangled: yet in every one of them, numbers are finally given up to “a strong delusion to believe a lie; “that they might all be damned, who believed “not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” How is it then, my brethren, that any of us have been “recovered out of the snare of “the devil, who had taken us captive at his will?” We can in no other way account for it, than by saying, that God mercifully “gave us repentance “to the acknowledging of the truth.” “God “who is rich in mercy, of his great love where- “with he loved us, even when we were dead in “sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.”— “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and “that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” “The Giver of every good and perfect gift,” not only bestowed the Saviour, and the free pardon and salvation of all that truly believe in him; but he gave us repentance and faith likewise, and “made us willing in the day of his power:” and thus he has a claim upon us for the highest possible gratitude and admiring praise.

¹ 2 Thes. ii. 11, 12. ² 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26. ³ Eph. ii. 3—8.

Even since the time, when we first were “warn-
“ed to flee from the wrath to come,” and to “lay
“hold for refuge on the hope set before us;” how
numerous have been our conflicts, difficulties, and
dangers? Many, who appeared to the most com-
petent judges far more promising than we were,
“in time of temptation have fallen away;” or
“they have been choked with cares, and riches,
“and the lusts of other things, and have brought
“no fruit to perfection.” Some have evidently
returned to “their wallowing in the mire, and
“their last state is worse than the first.” Others
have been “carried about with every wind of doc-
“trine, by the sleight of men, and cunning crafti-
“ness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” Thus
they have proved “unstable in all their ways,”
have become the zealous propagators of some pes-
tilential heresy, or have “turned aside to vain
“jangling.” Many have grown lukewarm in the
grand essentials of religion, and proportionably
fierce and contentious in supporting certain *dog-
mas*, by which some parts of the truth are pushed
to anti-scriptural extremes. In short, in a course
of years, if we have accurately observed the affairs
of the church, we have witnessed and lamented
many astonishing changes, suited to excite our
gratitude to God, who “hath hitherto helped us,”
and guided us at a distance from those rocks,
quick-sands, and whirl-pools, which have proved
fatal to numbers.

Our own experience likewise may help us to form a proper judgment of the divine goodness, in thus far protecting and upholding us. If we have for any length of time “fought the good fight of “faith,” we must have a consciousness, that in many instances we were “cast down, but not destroyed.” Our enemy has been sometimes ready to rejoice over us as actually vanquished. Outward circumstances gave force to our innate depravity, and our customary or easily besetting sins: the tempter was permitted “to sift us as wheat;” “we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that “we should not trust in ourselves, but in God that “raiseth the dead.” Perhaps temptation prevailed against us; and a guilty conscience united with an unbelieving despondency to bring us into deep waters. The insults of enemies, or the censures of friends, perhaps concurred with divine rebukes and corrections, to dismay our hearts. Yet amidst all, we determined, even from the belly of hell, to look unto the Lord, and to cry unto him, “O LORD, I “beseech thee deliver my soul!” We waited on “him, and he heard our prayer; he brought us “out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay; he “set our feet upon a rock and established our go- “ings: and he hath put a new song into our mouth “even praise unto our God.” Thus “he delivered us from so great a death, and in him we “trust that he will yet deliver us.”² Even if our

¹ Ps. xl. 1—3. cxvi. 1—8. cxxx.

² 2 Cor. i. 9, 10.

conflicts have not been so severe, if we have not been thus baffled and shamed, we know to whom we owe our preservation: and we have had so many humiliating proofs of our own perverseness, weakness, negligence, and relapses into idolatrous attachments and various evils; that we cannot but look upon our escapes as marvellous, and sometimes stand amazed, that we have not been left to renounce or disgrace the gospel! Every year, month, week, or even day, during which we have been preserved, and every declension from which we have been recovered, is an addition to obligations already great beyond all computation.

Indeed a general view of our situation in this evil world must increase our conviction, that the Lord alone hath kept us, or can keep us, from evil. The countless dangers of our path; the course of the world, with its maxims, fashions, examples, and allurements; the influence of fear, hope, affection, and even gratitude to men, upon our religious conduct; our natural strong desire of honour, friendship, ease, wealth, or indulgence; our aversion to censure, reproach, contempt, and poverty; and the various ways, in which these propensities may be addressed to turn us aside from the direct path, suggest many interesting reflections to the serious mind. The infectious examples even of some zealous preachers and professors of evangelical truth, and the worldly spirit sanctioned by them: with the snares, which are laid in all our

employments, connexions, and comforts; in solitude and company, and even in religious duties: the number, power, subtlety, and unwearied malice of our enemies the powers of darkness: the fallibility of our judgment, the scantiness of our knowledge, the weakness of our purposes, and the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of our hearts; all remind us, how greatly we are indebted to the Lord, who hath hitherto helped us. It is indeed a marvellous mercy, if we can say, "Having obtained help of God, we continue to this day;" and have neither made a shipwreck of our faith, nor brought a scandal upon the gospel; but still desire with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord.

Much more might profitably be added did time permit, concerning the continued kindness we have received: in the friends raised up for us; and the way in which our heavenly Father hath made up our losses, extricated us out of difficulties, moderated our temptations, renewed our comforts, revived our hopes and earnestness, prolonged our days, and afforded us means of grace and opportunities of usefulness. These, and many more subjects may be thought of, in our private meditations, while we endeavour to enter on another year, with thankfully acknowledging that "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us."

II. Then we enquire what is meant by "Setting

“up an Eben-ezer,” according to the common, and not improper, use of the expression.

The nature of the case, and the example before us, concur in proving, that it implies a disposition to give God the glory of all the blessings we have received. We do not ascribe the favourable difference between our situations, prospects, or character, and those of other men, to *our own* wisdom, management, or exertions; but to that God, ‘from whom ‘all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just ‘works do proceed.’ We pretend not to have merited the divine protection, guidance, and blessings; but feel that all was given us as creatures, without our deserving any thing: and that every good thing bestowed on us as sinners, is contrary to our deserts. We ascribe none of our deliverances or successes to chance, necessity, or second causes: but trace them all to the great First Cause; to him “who doeth all things after the counsel of his own will.” Samuel gave not the honour of Israel’s preservation to any of the servants of God, who had been raised up from the days of Moses, nor did he take it to himself; but ascribed it to the Lord alone. “Who then is “Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom “ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? “I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave “the increase. So then, neither is he that planted “any thing, neither he that watereth; but God “that giveth the increase.” To set up an Eben-

ezer therefore implies a disposition to say, in praise as well as in prayer, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake:" and to ascribe all our blessings to the everlasting love of the Father, to the atonement and mediation of the Son, and to the sanctification of the Holy Spirit.

It implies also an open acknowledgment of our obligations to the Lord; a confession of our own unworthiness; and an endeavour, by all proper means, to perpetuate the memory of his great goodness towards us, in our families, and among all with whom we are connected. An open profession of the truth with a consistent example and conversation, attendance on the ordinances of God, diligence in the instruction of children and domesticks, and the improvement of our several talents to promote true religion, constitute such an avowal of our obligations to the Lord. These things tend to diffuse the knowledge of his abundant kindness, and to preserve the remembrance of it, for the encouragement of our brethren, and an inducement to sinners to seek the participation of our privileges.

We must not, however, be satisfied with thankful acknowledgments of the past; but when we set up an Eben-ezer, and say, "Hitherto hath the LORD helped us;" we should renew our dedication of ourselves to him in respect of the future. "Thou hast avouched the LORD this day to be thy

“ God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his
 “ statutes, and his commandments, and his judg-
 “ ments, and to hearken to his voice. And the
 “ LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his pecu-
 “ liar people, as he promised thee; that thou
 “ shouldst keep all his commandments: and to make
 “ thee high above all nations which he hath made,
 “ in praise, in name, and in honour; and that thou
 “ mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy
 “ God, as he hath spoken.”¹ Having thus far ex-
 perience the Lord’s faithfulness and mercy, the
 pleasantness of his ways, and the misery of depart-
 ing from them; we thank him for the past, and
 express our purpose and desire of walking with him
 all the residue of our lives. Our review of the way
 which we have come invigorates these determina-
 tions, increases our simplicity of dependence on
 his continued grace, and teaches us the necessity
 of greater vigilance and circumspection; that
 “ whether we eat, or whether we drink, or what-
 “ ever we do, we may do all to the glory of God.”

In these respects the Lord’s supper is a stated
 method of setting up an Eben-ezer. When, with
 serious recollection and self-examination; with
 renewed exercises of repentance, faith, and love;
 with humble confessions, fervent prayers, and
 thankful praises, we commemorate the sufferings
 and death of our Redeemer: we then join ourselves
 to the Lord and his chosen people; we avouch him
 to be our God; we thank him for the past, and

¹ Deut. xxvi.

commit ourselves to his keeping for the future; and we declare our determined purpose, by his grace, to walk in his holy ways during the remainder of our lives. It seems therefore peculiarly proper to begin a new year, with this solemn act of adoring praise, this renewed dedication of ourselves to the service of our God and Saviour.

This review should likewise excite us to be “followers of God, as dear children, and to walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.” Our conduct towards others ought to be a constant imitation of the long-suffering, compassion, readiness to forgive and relieve, and persevering goodness, of the Lord towards us; that “we may never be weary of well-doing,” or “be overcome of evil;” but that we may “overcome evil with good.”

Finally, the recollection and thankful acknowledgment that “Hitherto hath the LORD helped us,” should encourage our hearts to run with patience the remainder of “the race set before us.” “The LORD, that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.¹” He, that hath preserved and assisted us in so many dangers and difficulties already, will “never leave us nor forsake us.” “He fainteth not, neither is weary.” His understanding is infinite, his resources inexhaustible, his faithfulness unailing, and his mercy everlasting. We should therefore

¹ 1 Sam. xvii. 37.

comfort one another with these considerations, learn “to cast all our care on him who careth for us,” and pour out our hearts before him; we should remember that “our Father knoweth what things we have need of,” and that “no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” “Clouds and darkness are about Him,” and gloomy prospects may meet our view; but the perfections and covenant-engagements of the Lord are unchangeable; and “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” “He will never suffer us to be temptèd above what we are able: but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it:” yea, “The Lord shall deliver us from every evil work, and will preserve us to his heavenly kingdom. To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

These are some of the encouragements and instructions, which real Christians may receive from the subject before us. But how stand matters with our souls? Hitherto the Lord hath prolonged our lives, and we now enter on another year; while numbers have been removed to the regions of darkness and despair, and some to the realms of endless day.—Many of our acquaint-

* 1 Cor. x. 13. 2 Tim. iv. 18.

ance or relatives are gone to their long home; yet we remain in the land of faith, of hope, of mercy, and of prayer. But "the time is short;" "the end of all things is at hand".—A little moment, as it were, will terminate our season of probation and preparation for eternity; the continuance of our earthly comforts or trials, and our opportunities of doing good to men, and glorifying God in this world of sin and misery.

Have none of you then entered on this new year, destitute of vital godliness, strangers to repentance and works meet for repentance, and unacquainted with a life of faith in the Son of God, and communion with the Father through him? Are none of you still loitering and procrastinating, loath to part with worldly idols, and averse to diligent piety? Or are you not trying to persuade yourselves, that so much strictness is unnecessary, that by attention to decent forms and moral duties, or an assent to certain doctrines, you may reconcile religion with your worldly spirit and pursuits, and thus serve God and Mammon?—You have indeed been spared to enter on another year, and have great cause, though little heart, for thankfulness: but what assurance have you that you shall live to the close of it? Several who joined with us last year in the service of the day, are now entered on an eternal state; and probably many of us will join them before this year shall terminate. And how terrible will this be to those, who by a

perverse abuse of the Lord's abundant mercies, have increased their own condemnation! Still "the Holy Ghost says, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."—"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found; call ye upon him, while he is near." And we intreat you, join your prayer for yourselves to our supplications in your behalf, that in the present year you may be "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

Perhaps some are blessing God, that this has been their happy case, during the preceding year; and are now saying within themselves, 'Had I died before the year 1795, I should have perished in my sins, without Christ and without hope. But the Lord who spared me when others were cut off, and rescued me from numberless dangers seen and unseen, when I habitually trampled on his commandments, and neglected his salvation, hath at length, in boundless mercy, "granted me repentance," enabled me to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and taught me by his grace to walk in newness of life. "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercy."—How memorable with you and my brethren, even to eternal ages, will be this "acceptable year of the LORD," which to many hath doubtless been "the day of vengeance of our God!"

Oh, endeavour to 'shew forth his praises, not only
 ' with your lips, but in your lives, by giving up
 ' yourselves to his service, and by walking before
 ' him in holiness and righteousness all your days.'
 Then many will glorify God on your behalf, and
 you will be in some degree instrumental in bring-
 ing others to seek the same blessings. Abide
 in Christ; keep close to the means of grace;
 watch against temptation; "be not high-minded,
 "but fear," for your enemies are many and your
 hearts deceitful; yet "be sober and hope unto
 "the end," "For greater is he that is in you,
 "than he that is in the world." Wait on the Lord
 continually, that he may renew your strength:
 and take heed, lest an increase of knowledge
 and maturity of judgment should be attended by an
 abatement in the fervour of your affections. Be
 not contented with the low attainments of this
 lukewarm age; but follow those, who have most
 closely followed Christ. And now approach with
 us to his table, to avow your acceptance of his sal-
 vation, and surrender of yourselves to his service;
 that, as "bought with a price, you may glorify
 "God with your bodies and spirits which are his."

Some perhaps to this very day, may stand in
 doubt to what class or company they belong.
 May the Lord enable such persons, to begin this
 new year, with "giving all diligence to make their
 "calling and election sure!" Enquire, my friends,
 with impartial strictness, into the reasons of your
 uncertainty and darkness: cast away every idol,
 break off every entangling pursuit or engagement,

return from your backslidings, and seek the Lord with all your hearts: that should this year terminate your lives; your setting sun may break forth with cheering beams, and gild the dark valley through which you must pass: or should you be spared; that your walk may be henceforth more close with God, more honourable and comfortable, and more edifying and encouraging to those around you.

My Christian brethren! let us enter on this new year, by seriously reviewing the one that we have finished: that we may be humbled for the sins, into which we have been betrayed, and rendered more simply dependent and watchful: and that we may be more thankful for the special mercies, personal, social, and publick, with which we have been favoured. Let us earnestly beg a blessing from God on every attempt we have made to sow the seed of truth, to speak a word in season, and to recommend the gospel: beseeching him also to prevent the bad effect of our mistakes and inconsistencies. We should likewise remember that time is short: that we may learn patience in tribulation, joyfulness in hope, indifference about things present, and diligence in our proper work. “Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might: for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.”¹ “Let your loins then be girded, and your lamps burning;” and be habitually expecting the coming of the Lord. Endeavour to recollect what designs of

¹ Eccles. ix. 10.

usefulness you had formed, and intended to have executed during the last year, or in any former period; and set about them without delay: persevere in every good work, and Christian course, on which you have entered; and aim to press forward, to grow in grace, and abound more and more in all the fruits of righteousness. Then should this be your last year, as it possibly may, and as some have probable reason to expect; death will be your gain: and while the survivors among us may meet together at the return of this season to set up another Eben-ezer to our merciful God; others will have joined the company before the throne, and be triumphantly rejoicing and blessing the Lord, that he hath helped them quite through, made them more than conquerors, and placed them for ever out of the reach of dangers and enemies.— May we all, as in succession called out of this world, thus join the heavenly worshippers; till at length,

‘ When all the chosen race
‘ Shall meet before the throne,
‘ To bless the conduct of his grace,
‘ And make his wonders known;’

we may be found of that happy number, and meet once more to set up an Eben-ezer in the world above, and to join in eternal adorations of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the one God of our salvation, to whom be praise and glory for evermore. Amen.

SERMON XVIII.

ISAIAH, ix. 13.

For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them; neither do they seek the LORD of Hosts.

“**T**HE LORD sent a word unto Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel:” JEHOVAH had denounced judgments on the nation descended from the patriarchs; which had begun to be accomplished on the kingdom of Israel, by the kings of Syria and Assyria: yet the people disregarded these tokens of his displeasure. “And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say, in the pride and stoutness of heart; The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars. Therefore the Lord shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies

‡ Preached on the ninth of March, 1796, being a day of fasting and humiliation.

“together. The Syrians before, and the Philistines
 “behind, and they shall devour Israel with open
 “mouth. For all this his anger is not turned
 “away, but his hand is stretched out still.” After
 all the calamities, which came on Israel by these
 numerous enemies; still more complicated and
 tremendous miseries awaited the nation, which
 would terminate in their final ruin and dispersion.
 “For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth
 “them; neither do they seek the LORD of
 “Hosts.”—The text, thus opened, suggests the
 following topicks suited to the present emergency.

I. Under affliction we should remember that
 the Lord smiteth us.

II. It is our duty and wisdom in this case
 to turn unto him.

III. As Israel of old did not, so Great
 Britain at present doth not, properly attend to
 this duty.

IV. This circumstance may well create
 most serious alarms, concerning the event of
 our present calamities.

V. The admonitions and instructions,
 which may be deduced from these consider-
 ations.

I. We observe, that under affliction we should remember that the Lord smiteth us.

A vain philosophy is at present employed, to resolve all events into second causes, and impute them to men or measures: as if that God, who “doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth,” in fact did nothing; but left the universe to the established laws of nature, or the uncontrouled devices and machinations of his creatures!—I would not be supposed, my brethren, to speak against philosophy; that is, the investigation of the works of God, and a sober enquiry into the ordinary rules by which he governs the world: for this conduces to an intelligent perception of his operations, and an admiring sense of his wisdom, power, justice and goodness. But sceptical reasonings about second causes, and an undue attention to instruments, exceedingly tend to make men overlook the First Cause, that great Agent “who worketh all in all.”

In this respect as well as others, we should learn “to speak according to the oracles of God:” for in scripture his hand is acknowledged on every occasion. “By Naaman the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria.” “I inform you,” (says the apostle) “of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;” that is their liberality, which was the effect of divine grace. “Thanks

“ be to God who put the same earnest care into
 “ the heart of Titus.¹” The exercise of faith leads
 us to view God in every object and event, to taste
 his love in our most common mercies, and to sub-
 mit to his correction by whatever means it is
 brought upon us.

The arrogance, blasphemy, rapacity, and ambi-
 tion of Sennacherib can scarcely be exceeded : yet
 observe what the Lord says of him ; “ O Assyrian,
 “ the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand
 “ is mine indignation. I will send him against an
 “ hypocritical nation ; and against the people of
 “ my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the
 “ spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them
 “ down as the mire of the streets : howbeit he
 “ meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so.²”
 Hezekiah and his principal assistants in reforming
 Judah were sincere and zealous :³ but many of the
 princes, priests, and people had been mere dissem-
 blers in their concurrence. The Lord therefore
 determined to employ Sennacherib, to execute
 judgment on them for this hypocrisy ; and when
 he had fulfilled that commission he meant to take
 still more signal vengeance on him. It is vain
 then for us to expect success against our enemies,
 merely because they are infidels or atheists, if we
 are only nominal Christians : for the Lord com-
 monly employs such men to correct or punish his

¹ 2 Kings, v. 1. 2 Cor. viii. 1—3. 16, 17.

² Is. x. 5—7.

³ 2 Chron. xxxi. 20, 21.

hypocritical worshippers.—Executioners, in general, are not the most respectable characters; and a malefactor would act absurdly, who should hope to escape the sentence denounced against him, because he supposed the person, appointed to inflict it, more criminal than himself!

The Lord smote Egypt with desolating plagues; and flies, lice, locusts, and frogs were his instruments, in pouring contempt, as well as vengeance, on haughty Pharaoh. But in smiting the Canaanites, he gave Joshua and Israel a charge against them. These nations deserved their doom; and an express commission, sealed by undeniable miracles, fully warranted all that was done against them. Yet in general, the instruments of punishment are unrighteous, though the Lord is righteous in the judgments they inflict. When the Israelites provoked him, the Philistines, Midianites, Syrians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Greeks, and Romans were successively employed in smiting them: the rod of correction; or sword of vengeance, was changed; but the hand that used it was the same. Nay, when domestick usurpers, tyrants, or persecutors, like Ahab, Athaliah, or Manasseh, brought calamities upon them, God made use of them as his instruments. “Shall
“there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not
“done it?”¹ The evil of *sin* is wholly from the creature; but the evil of suffering from the Lord,

¹ Amos, iii. 6.

who thus punishes the transgressions of his offending subjects, Whether afflictions come immediately from the hand of God, as sickness, famine, pestilences; and earthquakes; or by the intervention of men, the case in this respect is not altered. The Chaldeans and Sabeans unjustly seized on Job's property, and slew his servants; fire from heaven consumed his flocks; and the wind threw down the house upon his children: yet he made no distinction, but said in general, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Whether, therefore, our present publick distresses and dangers be the natural consequences of providential dispensations; or whether the misconduct of men have been, and is, in any degree the cause of them; we must acknowledge that it is the Lord who smiteth us.—A scarcity and dearness of provisions, decay of trade, and various hardships, are generally complained of: and many imagine that they are occasioned by the mistakes, or crimes, of this or the other description of men. Now, in a political sense, it is of great importance to investigate the point, and to use proper methods of counteracting every attempt of this kind: but as a religious concern, it is not in the smallest degree material; for, on every supposition, the hand of God should be acknowledged: and as a minister of religion, I must declare, that, till proper methods of discovering and removing the distresses we feel be

used and prospered; the righteous Lord continues to smite us, whether *unjust* men be his instruments or not.

“The Lord’s voice crieth unto the city, and the “man of wisdom shall see thy name.” The power and perfections of God are perceived by men of wisdom in all publick calamities. “Hear ye then “the rod, and who hath appointed it.” The rod calls us to repentance: but unless we recollect, who it is that hath appointed it, we shall not hear and obey its voice, however we may smart and groan under its repeated strokes.—I insist the more fully on this point, because Satan successfully contrives to perplex the minds even of serious persons about it. They are told, and they believe, that this or the other description of men, by their folly or knavery, occasion the publick distresses: and others dispute with them and vindicate men and measures. But in the mean while, “the “Lord’s hand is lifted up, and they will not see;” he smites, and they refuse to humble themselves before him: being employed in disputing about the rod and the sword,

But if some men be infatuated in their counsels, or others intoxicated by extravagant projects; if one set of men will be rich at any rate; another try to abuse power in tyranny and oppression; or a third would throw a nation into confusion, civil

¹ Micah, vi. 9.

war, or anarchy, to gratify their own ambition or rapacity: the Lord permits them to practise and prosper, in order by them to scourge a hypocritical or ungodly people. When David was left, in vain-glory, to number Israel, which made way for the desolations of a pestilence; the nation had first provoked God by their sins to leave the king to that pernicious project.¹

When we recognize the hand of God in our sufferings, we must not only view his power, but submit likewise to his justice. “We are consumed
 “by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled: thou hast set our iniquities before thee,
 “and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.”² We should not only consider sin, but *our own* sins, as the cause of our afflictions.—It is a common, but a most absurd mistake, to profess humiliation before God for national crimes as the cause of publick judgments: and yet to think only of the sins committed by other men. But “are
 “there not with us sins against the Lord our God?” “Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?
 “Let us search, and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our
 “hands unto God in the heavens. We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not
 “pardoned.”³ Did we thus search and try

¹ 2 Sam. xxiv. 1.

² Ps. xc. 7, 8.

³ Lam. iii. 39—42.

our ways, and compare our past and present conduct with the law of God; we should soon be convinced of our personal criminality, and should both join in the service of the day, and do it heartily and earnestly. No suffering which any man endures, as sharing in national calamities, is more severe than his sins deserve: the criminality therefore of others should not prevent our acknowledging the righteousness of God, in his most afflictive dispensations.

His *mercy* indeed should also be noticed in our chastisements. He is very merciful in correcting us for our sins, and not leaving us to be hardened by prosperity. To “fare sumptuously every day,” without warning or rebuke, and then to be cut off at once, and to lift up the eyes in hell amidst hopeless torments, is the most dreadful case imaginable. “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth:” and all our present sufferings are suited to induce reflection and teach repentance.

We should also be thankful that the Lord chastens us so gently; for “it is of his mercies we are not consumed.” Instead of our present light afflictions, we might justly be left to all the horrors of famine, during which tender mothers have eaten their children; our fields and cities might have been ravaged by fierce invaders; all our comforts and hopeful prospects might have been removed, and

every conceivable distress accumulated. We ought therefore to own the mercy of God in exempting us from the most excruciating anguish that can rend the human heart. Nay, we should remember the words of the Psalmist, "I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and thou "in faithfulness hast afflicted me." Corrections are needful, and are promised as blessings: when we pray for humility, a spiritual mind, increase of faith, and holiness; we in effect pray for chastisement: and we should therefore acknowledge the faithfulness of God to his promises, and his wisdom and love in answering our prayers, in a way we did not expect, but which was best suited to promote our most important advantages.

II. We proceed to shew, that it is our duty and wisdom under affliction to turn to God and to seek his favour.

If men smite us we may resist or retaliate; we may flee, or attempt to hide ourselves: but we cannot resist omnipotence, or conceal ourselves from him who is omniscient. Neither can we stand before him in judgment, or justify our conduct in his sight: so that we have no possible way of escaping his righteous vengeance, except by fleeing for refuge to lay hold of his mercy.—Whether the

! Ps. cxix. 75.

Lord contend with an individual or a nation, he will overcome; and he will continue to smite till we turn unto him. Obstinate impenitence is therefore a species of insanity: it is a perverseness which prolongs misery, and provokes the Lord to lay aside his chastening rod, and take his avenging sword. “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer, I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgression unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sins.¹” The Lord still waiteth to be gracious: he may be found upon the mercy-seat through Jesus Christ by the cry of penitent faith; and he never casts out those who humbly call upon him. Let us hear his words by the prophet. “I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue.—I will go and return to my place; till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early. Come and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn and he will heal us. He hath smitten and he will bind us up.²”—Thus he says likewise by the same prophet, “O Israel

¹ Ps. xxxii. 3—5.

² Hosea, v. 14, 15, vi. 1.

“return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast
 “fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words
 “and turn unto the Lord: say unto him, take
 “away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so
 “will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur
 “shall not save us, we will not ride upon horses;
 “neither will we say any more to the work of our
 “hands, ye are our gods; for in thee the fatherless
 “findeth mercy. I will heal their backsliding, I
 “will love them freely; for mine anger is turned
 “away from him.”

But another prophet more directly inculcates
 the duty of a nation under great distress. “There-
 “fore now also, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me
 “with all your heart, and with fasting, and with
 “weeping, and with mourning: and rend your
 “heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the
 “Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful,
 “slow to anger and of great kindness, and repent-
 “eth him of the evil.—Blow the trumpet in Zion,
 “sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather
 “the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble
 “the elders, gather the children and those that
 “suck the breasts; let the bridegroom go forth of
 “his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.
 “Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep
 “between the porch and the altar; and let them
 “say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine

† Hosea, xiv. 1—4.

“heritage to reproach;—wherefore should they say
 “among the people, where is their God? Then
 “will the Lord be jealous for his land and pity his
 “people.”—You see, my brethren, that the ordi-
 nances of this day are most perfectly scriptural,
 and that all orders of men are in duty bound to
 attend on them: nor will the misconduct of any
 persons whatever exculpate those who neglect
 them. Assuredly the Lord will not condemn us,
 however men may censure us, for complying ex-
 actly with the proclamation of our sovereign, pro-
 vided our services be not hypocritical.

The passage that hath been read demands our
 most particular attention: for it teaches us in what
 manner a people should “turn to him that smiteth
 “them.” We must return to him with all our heart,
 with unfeigned submission to his righteousness,
 and repentance of our sins; praying earnestly,
 “Turn thou us, and so shall we be turned:” “Create
 “in us a clean heart, and renew a right spirit with-
 “in us.” This should be accompanied with fast-
 ing, and other tokens of humiliation. Abstinence
 from every animal indulgence, and from food as
 far as health and circumstances will admit, is a
 scriptural acknowledgment, that we have forfeited
 our most common mercies, and that sin hath em-
 bittered them to us. It implies that our minds are

too much occupied with matters of the highest importance, to attend on such low concerns; that we wish to avoid all interruption of our sacred duties; that we mean to afflict ourselves with fasting, as a token of our submission to the Lord's correcting hand; and that we would use all means of crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts.

If we be indeed suitably affected with the consideration of our own sins, and the crimes and miseries of our countrymen; we shall turn to the Lord with that "godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of." Outward expressions, however emphatical, will not suffice; we shall rend our hearts in deep contrition and self-abasement, perceiving that we have no hope but in unmerited mercy, which we shall supplicate with fervency and importunity. And when princes, senators, magistrates, ministers of religion, and the people in general, laying aside all other employments, unite in thus humbly seeking the Lord of Hosts, a crisis may be expected in publick affairs. "Then will the Lord be jealous for his land and pity his people."

In this manner the king of Nineveh and his nobles, with all the inhabitants of that immense city, sought the Lord when he threatened to smite them; encouraged merely by a peradventure, "Who can tell, if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not?"¹ Surely

¹ Jonah, iii.

that heathen city will rise up in judgment with this Christian land and condemn it; for it repented at the preaching of Jonah; and doubtless our religious advantages are inconceivably greater: yet alas, how little does the observance of a fast in London resemble that proclaimed at Nineveh!

The words of the apostle likewise demand our serious consideration. "Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands ye sinners, and purify your hearts ye double minded. Be afflicted and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. Speak not evil one of another, brethren." Instead of reviling or condemning other men, every individual should be employed in confessing and lamenting his own sin, in humbly deprecating the Lord's indignation, and in using every means of overcoming evil habits and forsaking sinful courses.

This accords also with the exhortation of the prophet. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him."² But

¹ Jam. iv. 7—11.

² Is. lv. 6, 7.

without true repentance and works meet for repentance; no appearances of strictness, humiliation, or grief will constitute such a fast as the Lord hath chosen. “Wherefore have we fasted, and thou “seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, “and thou takest no knowledge?—Behold in the “day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all “your labours. Behold ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness.¹”

The substantial and permanent effects of repentance, and faith in God’s mercy, must be manifested in our future lives; if we would be thought sincerely to have turned to the Lord and sought him in our distresses. Nor can any nation be considered as having duly regarded the rod and the word of God; unless a general reformation and revival of religion take place: or at least till numbers, in the different orders of the community, use the most decided endeavours to restrain and discountenance vice and impiety; to reform inveterate abuses, which have been connived at and sanctioned by a corrupt policy; and to encourage and promote genuine piety and purity of manners.

III. This leads me to observe, that as the people of Israel did not, neither do the inhabitants of Great Britain, turn to the Lord that smiteth: an observation which I make with reluctance and unfeigned sorrow.

¹ Is. lviii.

Our peculiar mercies have been numerous and invaluable, for a long course of years : but our prosperity seemed at its height, just before the American war; when our iniquities provoked the Lord to smite us. During the calamities attending on that unhappy contest, we were called upon to observe one season of fasting, humiliation, and prayer, after another. On these occasions, while numbers employed themselves in political discussions and party-disputes; there were also many ministers from the pulpit, and some from the press, who endeavoured to observe the Lord's command to the prophet, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." They alleged, that the nation had been intoxicated with prosperity; was become arrogant and insolent; and had forgotten the Lord, ascribing their success to their own wisdom and prowess, and depending on themselves for its continuance. They shewed, that negligence and lukewarmness in religion had introduced various antisciptural deviations from the gospel, which gaining ground among the superior orders; and even the professed ministers of Christ, had opened the door to scepticism and infidelity, which were making rapid progress in the nation. They lamented, that impiety, contempt of God's word, profanation of his holy day in a variety of ways, perjuries multiplied and

connived at beyond all former examples; venality among all orders of the community; and shameless prevarication in solemn subscriptions, sacred engagements, and sacramental tests, were notoriously common. They affirmed that systems of fraud, oppression, and cruelty, especially in foreign parts; unprecedented luxury and dissipation among the higher orders in society; and licentiousness among their inferiors, even beyond the ordinary measures found in pagan or papal countries, together with many other crying iniquities, had provoked the Lord to contend with us. This representation was accompanied with earnest calls to repentance, and exhortations to every one to use his influence in attempting reformation, and promoting the cause of truth, piety, justice, and mercy, in his own sphere, and according to the duties of his station. Yet those warnings and admonitions, repeated from year to year, produced no sensible effects: the same evils continued and increased; and the services of the fast-day seemed generally and willingly forgotten, as soon as they were finished. We were, however, at length brought into a very alarming situation: yet the Lord, in answer to the prayers of the pious remnant in the land, remembered us in mercy: the storm was rebuked and a flattering calm succeeded.

But alas, instead of making suitable returns for such mercies; every one of those evils, which had been scripturally proved to be the causes of the

Lord's controversy, still contaminated the land: and all the protests and warnings of ministers and Christians were ridiculed as visionary, enthusiastical, and superstitious. The event, as men supposed, contradicted their forebodings, and increasing prosperity succeeded to the alarm. Yet, while the nation was thus saying "Peace and safety," a dark cloud began again to threaten a most tremendous storm. The violent and extraordinary changes which took place on the continent, and the spirit manifested by numbers at home, combined to excite most serious apprehensions. After a time this deplorable and eventful war broke out: and though our distresses have not hitherto been worthy to be compared with those calamities which many dreaded; yet they have certainly been very great, and none can say in what manner they will terminate.

Immediately, the same means of averting the divine indignation was resorted to: days of fasting and prayer have repeatedly been observed; and similar warnings and exhortations have been urged from the pulpit and the press. This is now the fourth time we have complied with the royal proclamation: and many zealous efforts have been made to awaken men to a sense both of our situation and our duty. But what effects have been witnessed? Who almost can be found, that manifests a more humble, spiritual, zealous, and conscientious disposition, in consequence of these ordinances? The few instances of this kind, which doubtless have occurred, are scarcely visible in the

great mass of those, who outwardly observe the day and then think no more about it. Many who are supposed to concur in its appointment, openly refuse to attend on any of its duties; and this gives others an occasion of representing the observance as a political device, and of turning the whole into profane ridicule!

Some fast, or *pretend* to “fast, for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness:” and while they revile, others pay court to, their superiors; and thus they make a day of fasting and prayer an opportunity of seeking favour, either from the populace or from the magistrate! In short, the very observance of so important and solemn an occasion, as it is too generally conducted, may be considered as an accession to our national sins: and the spirit discovered by numbers, even of those who in other respects seem to be religious, creates an alarm, lest the proper remedy for our maladies should hasten the death of the enfeebled patient.

In the mean time the most daring and blasphemous infidelity, scarcely distinguishable from atheism, is zealously propagated, and greedily imbibed by a deluded populace and the rising generation: while almost every effort to counteract its progress is marked with feebleness; nay, too often with treachery, the defenders of the outworks betraying the citadel into the hands of the besiegers! —Impiety, profanation of the sabbath, perjury, venality, dissipation, licentiousness, are rapidly in-

creasing. An unruly spirit disdaining subordination threatens to level all distinctions in society; while alas! few of those, who are thus distinguished, take proper and decided methods of counteracting its inroads, or softening the odium, envy, and contempt, from which it springs! The various species of vice and profaneness, heretofore protested against, are permitted to exist and gather strength; while little is so much as attempted in removing occasions and encouragements to them. Yea that horrid monster, *the slave-trade*, is still sanctioned by the British legislature, and conducted by merchants professing to be the disciples of Him, who said "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them!" These are notorious facts, and demonstrate that notwithstanding all appearances, "The people turneth not to him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts." And though the present scarcity seems to have given a temporary check to the excessive luxury that prevailed, and to have called forth a very commendable spirit of humanity to the indigent: yet other symptoms prove this to be merely a partial and occasional effort; and we may still say, that with comparatively a very few exceptions, "the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint." So that "except the Lord of Hosts had left us a very small remnant, we should have been like Sodom and Gomorrah."

IV. Then we observe, that this circumstance may justly excite serious alarms, concerning the event of our present difficulties.

If we were, as a nation, generally united in turning to the Lord, and strenuously seeking a revival of genuine Christianity: neither the number, courage, or violence of our foes; the wavering or dubious conduct of our allies; the weight of taxes and publick encumbrances; nor even the scarcity of provisions, could give alarm in respect of the future, to a mind accustomed to judge according to the scripture. But an opposite conduct, in a nation favoured like Britain with every advantage for religious improvement, must excite serious apprehensions for the consequences. No doubt we stand in the same relation to the Lord, that Israel did of old, and must expect to be dealt with according to the same measure. Nations, as well as individuals, which have not known the will of God, may be beaten for their crimes with few stripes: but we, who have had the most abundant opportunities of learning his truths and precepts, yet have pertinaciously continued in disobedience, must expect to be beaten more severely. “ You
“ only have I known of all the families of the
“ earth; therefore will I punish you for all your
“ iniquities.¹”

Let us attend to the words of the prophet, “ In
“ that day did the Lord God of Hosts call to weep-

¹ Amos, iii. 2.

“ing and to mourning, and to baldness, and to
 “girding with sackcloth; and behold, joy and
 “gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating
 “flesh and drinking wine: let us eat and drink for
 “to morrow we die.” Sennacherib’s invasion was
 a divine call to fasting, mourning, repentance, and
 prayer: but the people united excessive sensual
 indulgence, with infidel principles and daring im-
 piety. “And it was revealed in mine ears by the
 “Lord of Hosts; surely this iniquity shall not be
 “purged from you till ye die.”¹ Alas, does not
 the spirit and conduct of men in general through-
 out our land so exactly accord to this description,
 that a serious mind cannot but dread the denunci-
 ation of a like sentence against us?—Thus Amos
 also warned the Jews and Israelites in his time.
 —“Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and
 “trust in the mountain of Samaria.—Ye that put far
 “away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence
 “to draw near. That lie upon beds of ivory, and
 “stretch themselves upon their couches; that eat
 “the lambs out of the flock, and calves out of the
 “midst of the stall; that chaunt to the sound of
 “the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of
 “musick like David; that drink wine in bowls, and
 “anoint them with the chief ointments: but they are
 “not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. There-
 “fore shall they go captive with the first that go
 “captive: and the banquet of them that stretched
 “themselves shall be removed. The Lord God

¹ Isai. xx ii, 12—14.

"hath sworn by himself, I abhor the excel-
 "lency of Jacob and hate his palaces: therefore
 "will I deliver up the city with all that is therein."¹
 And in another place—"I have given you clean-
 "ness of teeth in your cities, and want of bread in
 "all your places: yet have ye not returned unto
 "me, saith the Lord. I have withholden the rain,—
 "yet have ye not returned unto me.—I have
 "smitten you with blasting and mildew;—
 "I have sent pestilence upon you.—I have over-
 "thrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom,
 "—and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the
 "burning: yet have ye not returned unto me saith
 "the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O
 "Israel: and 'because I will do this unto thee, pre-
 "pare to meet thy God, O Israel."² If the people
 would not return to the Lord, when he corrected
 them as a Father, let them prepare to meet him as
 an avenging Judge.

In this case the form of godliness, or profession
 of Christianity, will avail nothing. "To what
 "purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto
 "me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt-of-
 "ferings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts: and I
 "delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs,
 "or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before
 "me, who hath required this at your hands, to
 "tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations,
 "incense is an abomination unto me; the new

¹ Amos, vi. 1—8

² Amos, iv. 6—13.

“ moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I
 “ cannot away with: it is iniquity even your so-
 “ lemn meeting. Your new moons, and your ap-
 “ pointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trou-
 “ ble to me, I am weary to bear them. And when
 “ ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes
 “ from you: when ye make many prayers I will
 “ not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash
 “ you, make you clean, put away the evil of your
 “ doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;
 “ learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the op-
 “ pressed, &c.” “ They seek me daily, and de-
 “ light to know my ways, as a nation that did
 “ righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of
 “ their God: they ask of me the ordinances of
 “ justice, they take delight in approaching to God.
 “ —Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to
 “ loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy
 “ burdens, and to let the oppressed go free; and
 “ that ye break every yoke?” “ Think not to
 “ say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our
 “ Father.—Now is the axe laid unto the root of
 “ the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth
 “ not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into
 “ the fire.”³

These scriptures, to which many more might
 properly be added, abundantly prove that no ex-
 ternal humiliation, or publick honour put upon God
 and religion, can procure more than a respite to a
 guilty nation, unless repentance and works meet

¹ Is. i.

² Is. lviii. 2—6.

³ Matt. iii. 7—12.

for repentance be connected with them. Such an outward shew of contrition Ahab exhibited, and a reprieve was granted him: but the destruction of him and his family was not averted.

We are not authorized to say at what time, or in what manner, the Lord may see good to be avenged on such a nation as this. He deals with collective bodies and with individuals in some respects according to the same rules. Young persons having heard the wrath of God denounced against sin, frequently venture upon flagrant vices with considerable apprehensions: but escaping with impunity they grow bolder in wickedness, and are apt to conclude the threatenings of scripture to be mere empty words. Thus, "Because sentence against
"an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore
"the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them
"to do evil."¹ But "He that being often reprov-
"ed hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroy-
"ed and that without remedy."² Some are cut off in youth, others are spared, and persist in wickedness till they are grown old: but in general ungodly men are most secure when vengeance is at hand.³

In like manner guilty nations, being often warned, that their iniquities will bring down the judgments of God upon them, and finding respite, become hardened in sin; the remonstrances and reproofs of the Lord's servants are disregarded, or only expose them to reproach, scorn, and ill usage;

¹ Ecces. viii. 11.

² Prov. xxix. 1.

³ 1 Thes. v. 1, 2.

their measure of wickedness fills up rapidly, but without being observed ; and when infidel and impious presumption are at the height, vengeance overtakes them as suddenly, as if they had never been forewarned. Thus it was with Israel and Judah in the Assyrian and Chaldean captivities ; and especially this was the case of the Jews, at the time when Jerusalem, the temple, and the whole country were finally desolated by the Romans.

When the Lord has a number of believing servants and faithful ministers in a land, and they enjoy toleration and protection ; a hopeful symptom remains. Their example, prayers, and exertions in various ways, prevent a total prevalence of impiety and iniquity. They are “ the salt ” and “ the light ” of the land : and for their sakes the Lord delays national judgments, and executes vengeance on the individuals who provoke his indignation. But prevailing divisions among professed believers, attended with lukewarmness, formality, loose principles, extravagant sentiments, and scandalous practice, tend to subvert this bulwark of our country. The gradual but effectual success of those, who “ privily bring in damnable heresies ” into congregations and bodies of men, hitherto steadily attached to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel ; with the progress of infidelity on every side, are “ signs of the times, ” which threaten to deprive us of our last ground of confidence.

If the present generation of pious Christians should be taken from the evil to come ; and be

succeeded by such, “ as have the form of godliness but deny the power of it;” and if the number of zealous defenders of the truth should decrease; and timid, feeble advocates be substituted in their room: it is very probable that the Lord may permit the open enemies of Christianity to prevail for a season. In this case persecution may waste, or drive to a distance, the faithful remnant, suppress the testimony of the witnesses, and prevent the publick profession of the gospel; thus the light will be obscured or extinguished, and the candlestick removed, while infidelity and atheism will exult and triumph. Should this take place, no doubt the flood-gates of national judgments will be opened; and the vengeance of the Lord, against our flagrant contempt and defiance of him, be made manifest to all the world. This was the course of events in Judea, especially from the death of Josiah to the captivity: and when scarcely a man could be found to intercede for the land; the wrath of God was poured out upon them like an irresistible deluge: The same was still more remarkable, after the Jews in our Lord’s time had filled up the measure of their iniquities: for the persecuted Christians separated from among them, when the Romans invaded the land, and then wrath came upon them to the uttermost. Something analagous hath been commonly observed in the desolations of countries professing Christianity: and when we consider the dire calamities that have befallen a neighbouring nation, (for dire

they have been, in what way soever they may terminate,) we may well recollect our Lord's words, "Think ye that they were sinners above all men? "I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all "likewise perish." In the mean while the Lord waits to be gracious: and who can tell, but that faith and prayer may prevail, and that a timely repentance and reformation may yet take place, and "so iniquity shall not be our ruin?"

V. Then I proceed to deduce some instructions and admonitions, suited to the present emergency.

When Sennacherib invaded Judah, with a powerful army, uttering the most dreadful menaces and blasphemies; the pious king sent to the prophet Isaiah, stating the case to him, and saying, "Wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left:" and he himself spread the haughty Assyrian's letter before the Lord, and earnestly intreated his gracious interposition. Hezekiah indeed desired the prayers of an eminent prophet, who had long been employed in that honourable service: yet I apprehend, that we may properly consider his message to Isaiah, as a divine admonition to us at the present crisis. The providence of God hath formed a special relation between us and the land in which we live, similar to that we bear to our parents or children: we are therefore peculiarly bound to pray for its peace and welfare;

even as the captive Jews were commanded to pray for the peace of the country in which they had peace. We have received and still enjoy manifold advantages, temporal and spiritual, in this our favoured land; and we or our descendants shall probably participate the future prosperity or adversity, the blessings or calamities, that await the nation. Our personal transgressions form no small part of that guilt which calls for divine judgments on the land: and our lukewarmness and inconsistent conduct, as Christians, have helped to provoke God to deprive us of our religious privileges. It would therefore be a foolish hypocrisy in us, on this day of fasting and humiliation, to arraign the conduct of other men, and excuse our own.

On these and many other accounts, it is our undeniable duty "to lift up our prayer for the remnant that is left." There is still a remnant among us of real believers; there is still ground for hope in the Lord's mercy; "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much;" the most eminent believers who prayed with signal success, were men of like passions with us: even Isaiah once cried out "Woe is me, I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips;" yet his prayers were most effectually answered. It is likewise undeniable, that our enemies, like Sennacherib, want to subvert our holy religion, as well as our temporal prosperity: and this suggests a powerful plea in lifting up our prayer for national deliverance.

But it is confidently asserted by numbers, that prayers, offered on such occasions, are the dictates of revenge, ambition, or avarice. If avowed infidels alone held such language, it would not excite our surprize: but it is indeed most astonishing, that men, pretending to believe the Bible, should condemn a practice approved and commanded in every part of the sacred volume! Let us, however, examine how Hezekiah prayed.—“O Lord of
 “hosts, God of Israel, who dwellest between the
 “cherubim,” (that is, above the mercy-seat;) “thou
 “art the God, even thou alone, of all the king-
 “doms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and
 “earth. Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear;
 “open thine eyes, O Lord, and see; and hear all
 “the words of Sennacherib, who hath sent to re-
 “proach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the
 “kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations
 “and their countries: and have cast their gods
 “into the fire: for they were no gods, but the
 “work of men’s hand, wood and stone; therefore
 “they have destroyed them. Now, therefore, O
 “Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all
 “the kings of the earth may know that thou art
 “the Lord, even thou only.”¹ Nothing can be
 more plain, than that zeal for the honour of God
 and the interests of true religion, principally dic-
 tated this prayer. The Lord indeed answered it,
 “by terrible things in righteousness:” but Heze-
 kiah had only asked deliverance for his people, not

¹ Is. xxxvii. 15—20.

destruction on his enemies; and his expanded charity made him earnestly desire that all the kings of the earth might know the difference between the true God and worthless idols, and that they might diffuse that knowledge among their subjects.

I would not knowingly offer one prayer on this occasion, which could not be answered consistently with our enemies enjoying peace, security, liberty, good government, and the blessings of true religion: but we may pray that the Lord would ‘abate their pride, assuage their malice, and con-
‘found their devices,’ (that is, their devices against the peace of other lands, or the Christian religion,) in entire consistency with these friendly dispositions towards them: for such things would conduce to their advantage, as well as our own. We may not ask the Lord to aggrandize or enrich our nation, that she may reign over all countries, or engross all the commerce of the world: but surely we may pray that famine, pestilence, hostile invasions, and evil discords may be averted; that there may be employment and food for the poor, peace in our borders, and the continuance of our civil and religious liberties. Above all we should pray for the peace, purity, and enlargement of the church; that it may please the Lord to illuminate all the ministers of religion, ‘with true
‘knowledge and understanding of his word, that
‘both by their preaching and living, they may
‘set it forth and shew it accordingly,’ that

“labourers may be sent forth into the harvest;”
 “that the Spirit of God may lift up a standard”
 against the torrent of infidelity, impiety, and vice,
 that inundates the land; and that all ranks and or-
 ders of men may be endued with wisdom and grace,
 to serve God and their generation faithfully and suc-
 cessfully. Such prayers as these may be branch-
 ed out into a variety of particulars, without indulg-
 ing sinful passions, or violating the law of love.
 And if we pray in faith, depending on the Lord
 alone, and not on an arm of flesh; and duly con-
 sidering his almighty power and abundant mercy
 as fully adequate to all our necessities and dif-
 ficulties, we may yet hope that he may be in-
 treated for the land, and prolong our tranquillity.

But without personal repentance we cannot offer
 such supplications as these. It therefore behoves
 every one of us to consider our ways, to examine
 our hearts, humbly to confess our sins, to seek
 forgiveness, and to pray for grace that we may
 henceforth walk before God in newness of life. If
 any persons have hitherto continued impenitent
 and unbelieving; they should on this occasion set
 about the great concerns of their immortal souls,
 with peculiar diligence and earnestness. Otherwise,
 whether the Lord spare the land or not, he will not
 spare them. “Woe be to the wicked! it shall be
 “ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be
 “given him.”

† Is. iii. 11.

Even real Christians, at such a time as this, are called upon to review their lives, and renew their humiliation for all their past sins, as a part of the guilt accumulated by the land. They should especially consider their conduct as professors of the gospel, and enquire in what particulars they have dishonoured their profession, misled or weakened their brethren, or given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. We ought also to examine what fruit hath been produced by the solemnities, professions, instructions, and prayers of the last season of fasting and humiliation. We should ask ourselves, whether we have really acted consistently with them, and been more fruitful, zealous, and conscientious than before? Thus we shall be prepared to plead with him as his children and friends, in the manner that Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Jehoshaphat, and others of old did; and prevailing with him we shall prevail with man also.

But we must likewise remember, that we are bound to use our influence and improve our talents, by every exertion, to promote the cause, and obtain the blessings, for which we pray; both in our families and private circles, and in more public stations. Thus we should *seek*, as well as *pray for*, the peace of the community, the prosperity of the church, the reformation of manners, and removal of every occasion or encouragement given to vice and impiety. If indeed we are decidedly for the Lord, and determined to follow him fully,

without regard to men or dread of consequences; our conduct will have a considerable effect: for the example, endeavours, and prayers of his faithful people are the means by which our national character must be improved, and our privileges continued to us.

Let such, as profess to turn unto him that smiteth them, take care they do not rest in notions, forms, or external reformation; without true conversion, repentance, faith, and holiness. The prophet took notice of persons answering this description, when he said, "They return but not to the Most High."¹ And nothing more effectually prevents the conversion of sinners, than a mistaken idea that they are already converted.

Charity to the poor and afflicted is likewise an essential concomitant of acceptable fasting and humiliation: "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house? When thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning,—then shalt thou call and the Lord shall answer.—If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul: then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness shall be as the noon-day."²

Finally, my brethren, if you thus return to the Lord, and seek his face, I am sent to you with en-

¹ Hos. vii. 16.

² Is. lviii. 7—12.

couraging words. "Let the heart of those rejoice
 " that seek the Lord." " Say ye to the righteous,
 " that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat
 " the fruit of their doings."—" In the time of fa-
 " mine they shall have enough."—" Though the
 " fig-tree should not blossom," and every resource
 should fail, " yet they may rejoice in the Lord,
 " and joy in the God of their salvation." Be not
 therefore " afraid of evil tidings; let your heart
 " be fixed trusting in the Lord." If you hear of
 " wars and rumours of wars, see that you be not
 " troubled." Should a deluge come, the Lord
 will prepare you an ark, in which you may be se-
 cure and comfortable: and he will say to you,
 " Come, my people, enter thou into thy chamber,
 " and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself, as
 " it were for a little moment, until the indignation
 " be over-past. For behold the Lord cometh out
 " of his place to punish the inhabitants of the
 " earth for their iniquity. The earth also shall
 " discover her blood, and shall no more cover her
 " slain.¹"

¹ Is. xxvi. 20, 21.

SERMON III.¹

JOHN, 1. 29.

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

JOH^N Baptist, the predicted forerunner of the Messiah, was doubtless well informed of his person, offices, and kingdom. He prepared the way of the Lord, by preaching repentance, as indispensably necessary to a participation of the blessings about to be communicated: and while he baptized the people with water, as an outward emblem of their souls being washed from sin; he declared that the Redeemer would baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire. He bare witness to the Saviour as the Son of God, the Bridegroom of the Church, and “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” He cried, saying, “This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me;

¹ Preached Good-friday, 1796.

“ for he was before me : and of his fulness have
 “ we all received.” He added on another oc-
 casion, “ The Father loveth the Son, and hath
 “ given all things into his hand. He that be-
 “ lieveth on the Son hath everlasting life ; and he
 “ that believeth not the Son shall not see life : but
 “ the wrath of God abideth upon him.”¹”

It is evident, that this most eminent servant of God laboured to communicate to his disciples exalted apprehensions of the Lord Jesus, and to excite in them large expectations from him. In honouring the Son of God he was willing to abase himself, “ as unworthy to loose his shoe-latchet.” He was astonished to think that the Saviour should come to be baptized of him, when he was conscious that as a sinner he stood in need of his spiritual baptism : and when we consider the excellency of John’s character, with the extraordinary things spoken of him in scripture ; we shall know what conclusions to draw from his testimony. Certainly he would not have concurred with those, who employ all their abilities in trying to persuade mankind not to think too highly of Christ, not to honour him too much, and not to depend on him too entirely in the great concerns of eternal salvation.—But the words of the text must be exclusively our present subject ; and from them we may enquire,

I. On what account Christ is called "The Lamb of God."

II. The import of the words, "Who taketh away the sin of the world."

III. The call to "Behold the Lamb of God."

IV. The peculiar instructions to be derived from meditating on this subject.

I. On what account is the Lord Jesus called "The Lamb of God?"

We should not forget, my brethren, that the language of scripture was dictated by the Holy Spirit, and demands our most reverent attention on that account. If then we interpret it in a general way, and treat those metaphors under which divine mysteries are revealed, as we would do the language of mere men, who often use pompous words and extravagant figures of speech without much meaning; we shall be found guilty of despising the sacred oracles. No doubt every metaphor or illustration was selected, in preference to all others, for some wise and holy reasons; and suggests important instruction to the teachable

student. This must especially be the case, with that expression of the text, which engages our present attention: because it frequently occurs with reference to the character, sufferings, and salvation of Christ.

A lamb is a well known emblem of innocence, gentleness, patience, and purity: and no doubt an allusion was made to these things in speaking of the Redeemer as the Lamb of God. Yet we cannot suppose that this was the principal meaning of that appellation, when we duly consider the various passages in which it is used: for in what sense could a lamb *take away sin*, except by becoming an atoning sacrifice?

The slaughter of innocent animals, and consuming the whole or some part of their bodies upon an altar, was an essential part of religious worship, from the entrance of sin to the death of Christ.—Those animals alone were used for this purpose, which were the valued and useful property of man, and the most perfect in the kind: but lambs were by far the most common oblation. Thus Abel *by faith* brought the firstlings of his flock as an offering unto the Lord, and was accepted; but *faith* must have reference to a divine testimony, command, or appointment: this Cain disregarded, “leaning to his own understanding,” and virtually denying his need of an atonement; and therefore he was rejected. No sooner was Noah liberated

from the ark than he offered burnt-offerings to the Lord:¹ and doubtless the general opinion, that such sacrifices were proper to appease the anger of the gods, was derived from original tradition; for it seems to have no ground at all in human reasonings.

When Abraham, at God's command, went with full purpose of heart to offer his beloved son for a burnt-offering, Isaac, as acquainted with the customary oblations, said, "My father,—where is the lamb for a burnt offering?—And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."² Under the law, a lamb was the daily sacrifice, morning and evening: and on the sabbath days this was doubled. Thus harmless lambs, free from all spot and blemish, were presented at the altar day by day; while the priest, as representative of the congregation, laid his hands on the head of the sacrifice, and doubtless confessed over it the sins of Israel, which typically were by imputation laid upon it. Then the blood of the lamb was shed; and its body prepared and burnt upon the altar, by the fire which came down from heaven, as an emblem of the divine justice inflicting vengeance on the guilty. And when the blood had been sprinkled and poured out, according to the appointment; the priest went into the sanctuary, and burned incense on the

¹ Gen. viii. 20, 21.

² Gen. xxii. 7, 8.

golden altar, while all the people prayed without in the courts of the temple.¹

But the paschal lambs, which immensely exceeded in number all other sacrifices that were offered, (when the law was regularly observed,) were most emphatically prefigurative of Christ and his atonement. The unblemished lamb for every family was selected four days before the passover, when it was sacrificed in the presence of the elders and congregation of Israel: its blood was then sprinkled on the lintels and door-posts of their houses: and its body roasted whole was eaten within by all the professed people of God. The feast was celebrated with unleavened bread, and they were directed to eat it with bitter herbs, and with staves in their hands; in remembrance of their affliction in Egypt, their preservation when the first-born were slain, and their marvellous deliverance from bondage. The apostle teaches us how to interpret these things when he says, “ Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”² He is the true paschal Lamb, the spotless sacrifice for sin: he was predicted four thousand years before his coming in the flesh: and at length he was crucified for us,

¹ Lev. i. 4, xvi. 21. Num. xxviii. 3—10. Luke i. 9, 10.

² 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

at the demand and in the presence of the rulers and people of Israel. His intense sufferings, from the fiery wrath of God against our sins, answered to the prescribed roasting of the paschal lamb.—The profession of faith in his blood externally places the soul under the divine protection, while vengeance is denounced against unbelievers: but the inward experience of true Christians, who secretly, ‘feed on Christ in their hearts by faith with ‘thanksgiving,’ corresponds with their avowed dependence on him. In genuine sincerity and simplicity of heart, they exercise repentance, and mourn for their sins; they deny themselves, take up their cross, and bear sanctified afflictions; and, being set at liberty from Satan’s yoke, they set out on their pilgrimage to the heavenly Canaan.

With allusion to these types the apostle says, “Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, “as silver and gold,—but with the precious blood “of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and “without spot; who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.”¹ And John saw in his vision, “A door opened in heaven.”—“And there stood a Lamb, *as it had been slain*: “and the four living creatures and four and twenty “elders fell down before the Lamb,—and they “sang a new song, saying,—Thou wast slain and “hast redeemed us to God with thy blood.”—

¹ 1 Pet. i. 18—20.

The angels also joined these representatives of the universal church, "Saying with a loud voice, " Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive " power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, " and honour, and glory and blessing.¹" On another occasion the apostle " beheld, and lo, a " great multitude, which no man could number— " stood before the throne and before the Lamb; " clothed with white robes, and palms in their " hands; and cried with a loud voice, Salvation " to our God which sitteth on the throne, and " unto the Lamb."—"These are they, which " came out of great tribulation, and have washed " their robes and made them white in the blood " of the Lamb; therefore they are before the " throne of God;—and the Lamb, which is in the " midst of the throne, shall feed them, and lead " them unto living fountains of waters."²

It is evident that the emblem of a Lamb that had been slain, in all these places refers to the death of Christ, as the sacrifice for our sins, and the antitype of all the legal sacrifices, " Without " shedding of blood is no remission;" but, " it is " not possible that the blood of bulls and goats," or lambs, "should take away sins."³ As therefore all that were pardoned and saved from the first entrance of sin, were partakers of the benefits arising from the one oblation of Christ once

¹ Rev. iv. 1. v. 6—13. ² Rev. vii. 9—17.

³ Heb. ix. 22. x. 4.

offered ; so He is called “ The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

It is my design in these citations, to remove every shadow of doubt, and every degree of hesitation from your minds, concerning the meaning of the words “ The Lamb of God.” The honour of the divine law and government, and the satisfaction of the divine justice in saving sinners, required an atonement of infinite value. The wisdom of God therefore planned this method of redemption, and Christ is the Lamb of God’s appointment. “ When he cometh into the world he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me, in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book,” in the opening of the roll of scripture, “ it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.” All other methods of expiating guilt and rendering the salvation of sinners honourable to God, were unavailing : but when the Lamb of God came, and offered himself as an atoning sacrifice, the required satisfaction was made, and no further oblations were necessary.

But this appointed atonement was likewise of God’s *providing*. The plan of redemption by a sacrifice of infinite value would not have profited us sinners ; if everlasting love had not provided such an oblation. The whole universe could not

¹ Rev. xiii. 8.

² Heb. x, 4—10.

have supplied a single individual, whose dignity and excellency qualified him for such an undertaking; or whose love was so immense, as to influence him to interpose in our behalf. But “God spared not his own Son,” He gave him to be the propitiation for our sins; he *accepted* the oblation which he had appointed and provided; and in all these respects, Christ is “the Lamb of God.”—We proceed,

II. To consider the import of the words, “Which taketh away the sin of the world.”

The unblemished harmless lambs, which were sacrificed from the beginning, had no guilt of their own; yet they suffered as if they had been guilty. They were substituted in the place of the criminals; and the guilt or desert of punishment was typically transferred from the sinner to the sacrifice. It was imputed to the animal, who bare the punishment, while the offerer escaped: and it took away his sin by expiating the guilt of it.—Thus the Lord Jesus was substituted in our place; our guilt was transferred to him by imputation. He was sinless himself, and yet suffered as a sinner, in order “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life:” and in this manner he taketh away sin.

We are not, however, left to deduce this conclusion, from types and shadows, or our own

reasonings concerning them: for the sacred writers have most explicitly and energetically declared the same great truth. The prophet Isaiah, in his most wonderful prediction of the sufferings and glory of the Redeemer, says, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.—All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way, and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” “It pleased the LORD to bruise him, and to put him to grief: thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin—He shall bear their iniquities. He bare the sin of many.” You see, my brethren, that Christ not only bare our *punishment*, but our *iniquities*: and this can imply nothing less, than actual translation of guilt from the sinner to the sacrifice. ‘It was exacted, and he became answerable.’ He willingly consented to become our Surety, to assume our flesh, and expiate our sins by his own suffering and death upon the cross. He was capable of doing this, and willing to do it. The human nature he assumed was preserved free from all contamination of sin: so that his life was not forfeited, or suffering deserved, by any personal transgression. He had power to lay down his life and power to take it again, and no mere creature ever was or can be placed in a similar situation. “He loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice

! Bishop Lowth on Is. liii. 7.

“ unto God for a sweet smelling savour.¹” The imputation of guilt no more implied criminality or pollution : than the sacrificing of the harmless lamb rendered it sinful and defiled : or than a man becomes chargeable with the extravagance and profligacy of the poor insolvent whom he liberates from prison by paying his debt, out of the most generous compassion.

And let us not suppose, that this language concerning Christ bearing our *sins*, was merely that of prophecy or poetry : for the writers of the New Testament, in didactive prose, are equally decisive, or even more so. “ He was made sin for us, “ who knew no sin ; that we might be made the “ righteousness of God in him.²” This certainly implies a reciprocal imputation of our sin to Christ, and of his righteousness to us. “ Christ “ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.³” “ Who his own self “ bare our sins in his own body on the tree.”— “ He suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.⁴” “ Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption, that is in Christ Jesus, whom God “ hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith “ in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the “ remission of sins—that he might be just and the “ justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.⁵”—

¹ Eph. v. 2. ² 2 Cor. v. 21. ³ Gal. iii. 13.

⁴ Pet. ii. 24. iii. 18. ⁵ Rom. iii. 24—26.

These and many similar expressions, as connected with the institutions of the ceremonial law, and the reasonings of the apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews, are abundantly sufficient, to prove; not only that the doctrine of an atonement by the vicarious sufferings of Emmanuel is contained in scripture, but that it is the most prominent and central part of revelation. This is confirmed by the appointment of the Lord's supper, in perpetual remembrance of the death of Christ; and for a constant representation of the life of faith, under the figure of "eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ." We may therefore confidently affirm, that they who deny or explain away this doctrine, prefer their own reasonings to the sure testimony of God, and endeavour to remove the key-stone of an arch, the whole of which would at length fall down, if they could succeed. So that mere natural religion, which palliates and flatters human pride, will uniformly be preferred to the religion of the Bible, by all who lose sight of this fundamental doctrine: and facts do fully demonstrate that this has always in process of time been the consequence, when persons have argued themselves and others, out of the ancient and orthodox interpretation of redemption by the Saviour's atoning blood.

But the present occasion admits not a fuller discussion of this important subject. The propitiatory oblation made by the Lamb of God, being of

infinite value, was sufficient to take away the original and actual sin of mankind, even as if it had been but one complex transgression. Millions in every age have received the benefit of it; and if the whole human race should at once apply for pardon and salvation by the blood of Christ; it would suffice to take away all their sin. The efficacy of the typical sacrifices was confined wholly to the Jewish nation: but that of the one atoning sacrifice of Christ, extends equally to other nations. It is sent to them all without exception: and we can assure any sinner throughout the earth, that if he believe in the Son of God he shall be saved. So that none perish, because there is no help for them; but because pride, love of sin, and aversion to the spiritual service of God, harden their hearts in unbelief, and they “will not come to Christ, that they might have life.” In this sense “The Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world.”

But he also taketh away guilt from the conscience by the *sprinkling* of his blood.¹ The atonement made upon the cross eventually profits none but those, who apply it to themselves. This is represented in the Lord's supper, as it was of old by the eating of the paschal lamb, with the sprinkling of its blood. We are not communicants merely by hearing of, or seeing, the emblems of Christ's body and blood, but by eating and drinking

¹ 1 Pet. i. 2.

them. The Lord Jesus “ who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,¹” sends his gospel to sinners, and by the powerful convictions of the Holy Spirit, he effectually destroys their self-confidence ; then their conscience becomes burdened with the guilt of their former sins ; and whatever efforts they use to get relief, all prove ineffectual, till they understand the nature, and see the suitableness and glory of redemption by the blood of Christ. Applying in true repentance and living faith for an interest in this propitiation, they find the load of guilt removed, and obtain stable peace, connected with deep humiliation, hatred of sin, watchfulness against it, acquaintance with the divine law in their own hearts, and great tenderness of conscience. “ For if the blood of bulls and of goats, “ and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, “ sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh : how “ much more shall the blood of Christ, who, “ through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from “ dead works to serve the living God.²” Nothing but this view of the cross, this application to the blood of sprinkling, this washing in “ the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness,” can give that kind of peace and confidence which hath been described : because nothing else can shew the enlightened and humbled heart the divine justice

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6.

² Heb. ix. 13, 14. x. 22.

and holiness, in harmony with mercy and truth, glorified in pardoning and saving the chief of sinners. And whenever this peace has been lost through relapses into sin, there is no other way of recovering it, but that in which it was first obtained: nay indeed, it cannot be preserved in the midst of those numberless imperfections and defilements, that accompany our best days and duties, except by continual application to “the blood of Christ which cleanseth from all sin.”

In consequence of the atonement and intercession of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit destroys in the heart of his disciples, the dominion, love, and pollution of sin; by means of the motives, encouragements, and ordinances of the gospel. In this sense also, “the Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world:” for this is the only method, by which the hearts of men all over the world can be made holy; and all men in every nation of the earth, who believe in the name of Christ, are thus sanctified by faith in him.¹—“Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”² “You who were—enemies in your minds by wicked works; yet now hath he reconciled; in the

¹ Acts xxvi, 18.

² Eph. v. 25—27.

“ body of his flesh through death; to present you
 “ holy, and unblameable, and unproveable in his
 “ sight.¹” “ He gave himself for us, that he might
 “ redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto
 “ himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.²”
 Thus will the Lamb of God continue to take away
 the sin of believers all over the world, till there be
 no remains of it left; and till the whole company
 shall be “ presented faultless before the presence of
 “ his glory with exceeding joy.³”

III. Then we consider the call to “ Behold the
 “ Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the
 “ world.”

I shall not confine myself to the exact import of
 the words, as spoken by John; but refer likewise
 to several other scriptures of a similar nature.
 “ There is no God else beside me, a just God and
 “ a Saviour;—look unto me and be ye saved, all
 “ the ends of the earth.⁴” “ As Moses lifted up
 “ the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the
 “ Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever be-
 “ lieveth in him should not perish, but have eter-
 “ nal life.⁵” “ Looking unto Jesus, the Author
 “ and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy set be-
 “ fore him endured the cross, despising the shame;
 “ and is set down at the right hand of the throne

¹ Col. i. 21, 22.

² Tit. ii. 14.

³ Jude, 24.

⁴ Is. xlv. 21, 22.

⁵ John, iii. 14, 15.

“of God.¹” The Baptist may be supposed to have addressed his disciples to this effect: ‘You want pardon of your sins, and deliverance from the power and pollution of iniquity: “Behold” then “the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin “of the world.”’ He alone can confer these blessings; apply to him, become his disciples, rely on him entirely, and follow implicitly his directions; thus you will be saved, and be made instrumental to the salvation of your fellow sinners.’

But we may understand the call in a more comprehensive sense, as an exhortation to meditate seriously and frequently on the great doctrines thus revealed; to behold and contemplate the person and redemption of Christ with fixed attention and humble faith. He seems to address us from the cross, and to say, “Is it nothing to you, all ye “that pass by? Behold, and see, if there be any “sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto “me; wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in “the day of his fierce anger.” Let us then turn our thoughts from all other subjects, and with believing application to ourselves, contemplate the interesting scene, which we this day commemorate.

We cannot well enter on such meditations, without adverting to the language of the sacred writers, concerning the essential and eternal Deity of

¹ Heb. xii. 2.

² Lam. i. 12.

Christ, One with the Father, the Creator and Upholder of all worlds, the Object of universal worship and adoration. We consider this glorious Person coming in the flesh to be the Saviour of the world, to seek and save the lost, from mere love and compassion to deservedly perishing sinners. The spotless purity of his human nature; the perfection of his obedience to the divine law; the depth of his voluntary humiliation; the poverty and contempt, and the contradiction of sinners, which he endured through life, demand our most serious attention. He effected not his gracious purposes in our behalf, as a Monarch or a Conqueror; he taught not as a Philosopher or a Moralist: "but he took upon him the form of a servant," and "gave his life a ransom for many."

We should, however, especially contemplate the variety and intensesness of his sufferings, in the closing scene of his humiliation: the excruciating pain he endured, from the scourge, the thorns, and the nails, and when hanging on the accursed tree; with the anguish of mind he felt when agonizing in the garden, and when on the cross he exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is very important for us to reflect on what the Redeemer suffered from *men*; from the base treachery of Judas, the unfaithfulness of Peter, the cowardice of the disciples; the cruel injustice of Caiaphas, the scribes, priests, council, and even their servants; from the contempt and indignity

put upon him by Herod and his men of war; the cruelty and scorn of Pilate's soldiers; the lingering tortures of the cross, the ingratitude of the insulting multitude, and the revilings even of the malefactors. We should recollect likewise, that this was the hour and power of darkness: and what gloomy imaginations, and detested thoughts might be presented to the mind of Christ, by the subtle and energetick influence of evil spirits, may be best conceived by those who "are not ignorant of their devices." "He suffered, being tempted, that he might be able to succour them that are tempted:" and the assaults of Satan in the desert may convince us, that he would do his utmost, when permitted, to bruise the heel of Him, who came to crush his head and destroy his works.—

But we are also taught, that "it pleased the LORD to bruise him, and to put him to grief: and to make his soul an offering for sin." "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the Man that is my Fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts; smite the Shepherd." "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." And when we compare our Lord's agony in the garden, and his exclamation on the cross, with the conduct of his own disciples under the severest tortures: we must be convinced that his cup was embittered inconceivably more than

¹ Zech. xiii. 7.

theirs, and that consolations and supports were vouchsafed them, of which he was wholly left destitute.—We cannot explain this subject.—We may be certain, that remorse of conscience, despair, and the prevalence of hateful passions, which will eternally increase the misery of condemned sinners, could have no place in the mind of the holy Jesus: but whatever pain, shame, wrath, curse, agony, or misery, he could possibly endure; whatever the justice of God, the honour of the law, and the instruction of the universe in the evil and desert of sin, required; all this the Redeemer suffered, till he could say with his expiring breath, “It is finished.”

It should likewise be remembered, that our Lord most willingly submitted to all these sufferings, from love to our souls and regard to the glory of God. No man had power to take away his life: the prince of this world had no part in him; no personal transgression exposed him to the sentence of death; but “love, that passeth knowledge,” moved him to give himself a propitiatory Sacrifice for our sins! The meekness, patience, and persevering fortitude; with which our Lord suffered, should not pass unnoticed. “He was brought as “a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his “shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.” “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps; who, when

“ he was reviled, reviled not again : when he suffered he threatened not.”

The circumstances attending his crucifixion also form a proper subject of meditation. The sun was miraculously darkened, as a token of the divine displeasure, and an emblem of the gloom which overspread the Sun of righteousness. Yet, in this deep humiliation of the Lord of glory, he rescued one perishing sinner from the jaws of destruction, and took him with him to paradise. When he expired, “ the veil of the temple was rent ;” the rocks were torn by an earthquake, the graves were opened, and the preparation made for the resurrection of those saints, who were appointed to grace the triumph of the rising and ascending Saviour. For the event of his sufferings in his personal exaltation ; and the complete salvation, in body and soul, of all the unnumbered myriads, which ever did or ever shall believe in him, is the last particular, to which our present meditations should be directed.—But it is time for us to proceed,

IV. To consider the peculiar instructions, to be derived from these contemplations.

The worth of our immortal souls is most emphatically taught us by the cross of Christ. “ What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 21—23,

“lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Could any one literally gain the whole universe, as the price of iniquity, and keep it with every imaginable advantage during the term of human life; it could neither preserve his body from the grave, nor his soul from eternal misery! “It costs more to redeem the soul: that must be let alone for ever.” View the Saviour agonizing in Gethsemane, and expiring on the cross! Did he endure these unknown sufferings to preserve men from temporal poverty, pain, or death? By no means; but to deliver them from the wrath to come; where “their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” Who can doubt then, that an immortal soul is man’s principal treasure? It is possessed by the meanest, and it infinitely exceeds in value all the distinctions of the mightiest. He who made the soul knows its worth; and he deemed it so valuable, that he ransomed our souls from ruin, at the price of his own blood. Shall we not then deem the salvation of them our grand concern, and regard all interfering objects as unworthy our notice in the comparison? If we should never succeed in any one thing all our lives, except in this chief concern; our felicity will be congratulated by angels to eternity: if we should prosper in all other respects, and fail here; our folly and misery will be lamented and execrated for ever.

Our children also have immortal souls. Does

then our love of them induce us to use every means of providing for their comfort in this world; and shall it not influence us to proportionable earnestness in seeking their salvation? O cruel and infatuated parents, who take excessive care about the bodies of your children, and leave their precious souls to perish everlastingly for want of diligent instruction; or perhaps even help to murder them, by indulging their sinful dispositions, and setting them a bad example!—Nay, let us further learn to consider, that our relatives, neighbours, and enemies, have immortal souls. Because they are so valuable, “He that winneth souls is wise:” let us then think nothing too much to expend or attempt, in promoting that grand object, for which the Son of God shed his precious blood.

But, viewed in this glass, how vain does the world and all things in it appear! “God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.” What are empires, or the loss of them? What renown, or infamy? What affluence or poverty? What the most exquisite pleasure or torturing pain, when put in competition with eternal happiness, or misery? or when viewed in connexion with the cross of Christ? Had he not so loved us, all possible prosperity could not have prevented our everlasting misery: if we believe in him, all possible adversity cannot prevent our everlasting happiness. Let

us not then envy the wealthy and successful, but pity and pray for them: let us not covet worldly things, repine for want of them, or lament the loss of them: let us not join in the vain mirth of condemned sinners, or be satisfied with any thing short of the joy of God's salvation.

By contemplating the cross of Christ, we may learn the perfect justice and holiness of God, the excellency of his law, and the desert of sinners. In the condemnation of fallen angels and wicked men, and in many other awful ways, the Lord hath proclaimed his abhorrence of iniquity, and his determination to magnify his holy law: yet his mercy not being visible in those events, it might have been thought, either that he was incapable of shewing mercy, or that in exercising mercy he would abate from the demands of justice, and connive at transgression. But the subject before us, well understood, confutes all such vain imaginations. When mercy triumphed most illustriously, justice was most gloriously displayed, the law most honoured, and sin most exposed to universal detestation. 'Rather,' says the Saviour, 'will I bear the curse of the divine law, and the punishment of sin, in my own person, and make an expiation of infinite value by my sufferings and death upon the cross; than either leave sinners to perish without help, or allow the law to be dishonoured, and justice to be relaxed for their benefit.' "Do we

“ then make void the law through faith? God forbid, yea, we establish the law.”

Here again we may learn repentance, and abhorrence of our iniquities. “They shall look on me “whom they have pierced, and mourn.” The more lovely and glorious the divine perfections appear, the more excellent the holy law, and the more hateful and destructive transgression are found to be; the deeper should be our sorrow and remorse, while we recollect and review all our numerous and heinous offences, and all their aggravations: and the more ought we to dread and hate those evil propensities, from which all our crimes proceed, and which continually aim, as it were, to “crucify the Lord afresh, and put him to open “shame.” When we view the miseries of the world, and the ravages of death, we may well enquire, “Who slew all these?” And the consideration may help to abase us for sin, and excite us to oppose and crucify our lusts, which are the murderers of the whole human race, and menace our destruction. Yet the cross of Christ, when duly contemplated, suggests far more powerful motives for contrition and self-abhorrence, and will far more effectually influence us to seek the destruction of those hated enemies, that crucified the Lord of glory.

But the same object will likewise teach us, that neither our repentance or amendment, nor any

thing else we can do, will at all serve to expiate our guilt or justify us in the sight of God. "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ died in vain." Men set up a variety of reasonings against the express and numerous testimonies of God to this leading truth; and thus vainly "go about to establish their own righteousness." But a serious view of the Lamb of God, as taking away the sin of the world, may convince us that every hope they form of escaping condemnation or obtaining life, except by faith in a crucified Saviour, will most surely prove fallacious and ruinous: for if any thing else would as effectually have answered the purposes of God, he would doubtless have spared his own Son, and saved sinners in some other way.

On the other hand, we here behold the riches of the divine compassion and tender mercy towards the sinful children of men. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." If then God so loved us when enemies, what may not those expect from him, who renounce every other plea, and "flee for refuge to lay hold on this hope set before them?" In every penitent who supplicates mercy for the sake of Christ and his atoning blood, the Redeemer "sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied:" for this very purpose he suffered and died on the cross, "that he might become the Author of eternal salvation to all them

“ that obey him.” On this ground we say, “ Let
“ the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord :”
and “ if, when we were enemies, we were recon-
“ ciled to God by the death of his Son, much more
“ being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”
“ He that spared not his own Son, but delivered
“ him up for us all; how shall he not with him
“ freely give us all things?”

But while we mingle our tears of godly sorrow with joyful thanksgivings, and glory in Christ Jesus amidst all our tribulations: let us also, my brethren, look to the cross, and learn our obligations to the most self-denying and devoted obedience. Can we, with this object full in view, deem any expence too great, any sacrifice too costly, any cross too heavy, any labour too severe, which his glory, the authority of his command, or the benefit of his purchased flock, call us to undergo? Surely the constraining love of Christ will render every loss or suffering tolerable, yea, pleasant, to the thankful believer; while he beholds the Lamb of God, expiring on the cross, to take away that sin, which would otherwise have eternally ruined his soul; and to purchase for him everlasting and unutterable felicity!

Here too we must look, that we may learn patience, meekness, spirituality, and every part of that holiness to which we are called. Hence we must draw our motives and encouragements; and here we must view that perfect example, which we

are required to copy. Forgiveness of injuries, love of enemies, perseverance in well-doing amidst insult, contempt, and ingratitude, and compassion to perishing sinners, are best learned by looking to the cross; by witnessing the triumph of divine love in the sufferings of Emmanuel, and hearing him mingle his dying groans, with prayers for his cruel and insulting murders.

Meditation on this subject may also convince us, that we must expect tribulation in the world, and the enmity or contempt of unbelievers, if we belong to Christ and bear his image. His wisdom, holiness, and love were perfect: yet no one of our race ever experienced such hatred and insult from all ranks, orders, and descriptions of men, as the spotless Lamb of God! Malefactors commonly meet with some pity amidst their tortures, however merited: but Jews and gentiles, rulers, scribes, priests, soldiers, and the multitude, could unite in cruel mockery of the holy Jesus, when expiring on a cross! Away then with all those flattering sentiments of human nature, which represent it as loving and delighting in genuine excellency: the cross of Christ, and the sufferings of his most faithful servants in every age, form a demonstrative confutation of the proud delusion! And if our hearts have been changed by divine grace; so that we love and imitate the lowly and humble Saviour: let us count our cost, expect scorn and hatred from men, tribulation in the world, and peace and

consolation from the Lord alone. Let us also look beyond the cross, and contemplate the glory which followed: "that we may not be wearied and faint "in our minds." We too have a joy set before us: let us then endure our lighter cross, and despise the shame; assured that if we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him in glory.

But my fellow sinners, where will you appear at his second coming to judge the world, if you now neglect his great salvation? If you join his enemies; and, by cleaving to your sins, prefer Barabbas to Jesus, sell him as Judas did for a few pieces of silver, or determine you "will not have "him to reign over you?" Still he invites you to come to him, that you may have life eternal: Oh! that you would seek to him as a Saviour, who will shortly come to be your Judge.

In fine, contemplating the cross of Christ, teaches us most effectually every lesson contained in the sacred scriptures. Let us then, my brethren, further prosecute our meditations at the Lord's table: and while we remember the love and sufferings of our Redeemer, let us renew our repentance, and acceptance of his salvation, and give up ourselves to his service; that, "as bought with a price, we may "glorify him with our bodies and spirits which are "his."

SERMON XX.¹

I CORINTHIANS, XV. 20.

Now is Christ risen from the dead.

WE learn from this chapter, that some of the Corinthians had denied the doctrine of a resurrection; probably explaining away the apostolical language on that subject as figurative; and as only meaning conversion, or that change which took place in the world by the introduction of Christianity.² In confuting this dangerous error, the apostle called their attention to the resurrection of Christ, as an undeniable fact: and he shewed, that the denial of a resurrection was equivalent to saying that Christ was not risen; and thus tended to subvert the foundation of Christianity, and to destroy the hopes and comforts of believers. “If
“ there be no resurrection of the dead, then is not
“ Christ risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is
“ our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain;

Easter Sunday, 1796.

² 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.

“ yea, and we are found false witnesses of God.—
“ And if Christ be not raised,—ye are yet in your
“ sins: then they also which are fallen asleep in
“ Christ are perished. If in this life only we have
“ hope in Christ, we are of all men most misera-
“ ble.” All the joys and supports of Christians
are inseparably connected with future and eternal
felicity; without the hope of which they would
have nothing to counterbalance their peculiar trials
and conflicts.

If Christ were not risen, believers were yet in
their sins, and even the martyrs had finally perish-
ed. But were not the primitive Christians con-
verted from idols to serve the living and true God?
Did they not “repent, and do works meet for
“ repentance?” Were they not exemplary in the
practice of all good works? And did they not meet
death for the sake of a good conscience towards
God? How then could they be yet in their sins?—
Because, none of these things could atone for their
transgressions; and, if Christ were not risen, no
effectual atonement had been made: they must
therefore have still continued under condemnation,
and exposed to the curse of the law which they
had broken. A most conclusive proof, that the
death of Christ was a vicarious satisfaction for sin;
and that none can be saved, who are not interested
in that atonement!

It is deemed uncandid to charge men’s doc-
trines with the consequences resulting from them.

yet I apprehend we should all consider ourselves bound to warn people against the consequences of taking a poisonous mixture, even if he who administered it was not at all aware of its nature: and the apostle has here set us the example of doing the same, in opposing those erroneous doctrines by which immortal souls are fatally deceived.

He then adds the words of the text, "Now is Christ risen from the dead," and proceeds to treat very copiously on the doctrine of the resurrection. But I shall confine myself to the subject before us, and attempt,

I. To prove that Christ is risen from the dead.

II. To shew the inferences which may be drawn from that event.

III. To apply the subject to ourselves.

I. I shall prove that Christ is risen.

Though true Christians have "a witness in themselves," which in general satisfies their minds, as to the certainty of the things which they have believed: yet in peculiar seasons of temptation, an acquaintance with the evidences of Christianity would tend greatly to their establish-

ment. And in these times of infidelity and scepticism, all who would “contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints,” should be able to give a reason of their hope to every enquirer or objector: both to defend themselves from the charge of enthusiasm and credulity; to obviate the doubts of those with whom they converse; and to preserve young persons, perhaps their own children, from the fatal contagion. It is therefore greatly to be lamented, that pious persons are in general so little furnished with this sort of knowledge, of which they might make such important use.

It is commonly said, that the new Testament is built upon the foundation of the Old, and must stand or fall along with it: and there is a truth in this sentiment; though it be somewhat diverse, in its nature and consequences, from that which is generally supposed. Our Lord and his apostles have so frequently quoted the old Testament, and almost every part of it, as the *scripture*, the *word of God*, the *oracles of God*, and the *language of the Holy Ghost*; that their credit must be connected with the divine inspiration of the books thus repeatedly attested by them.—We are able to prove, that the canon of the old Testament in those days differed very little, if at all, from that which we have at present, yet our Lord referring to different parts of it, says, “Thus it is written, and thus it must be,” “the scripture cannot be broken,”

“ the scriptures must needs be fulfilled.” And the apostles say, “ All scripture is given by inspiration from God :” “ Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” This single consideration completely establishes the whole of the old Testament as a divine revelation, with all those who duly reverence the words of Christ and his apostles. In all other respects the new Testament stands on its own basis, and is proved to be the word of God by distinct evidence : it affords unspeakably more support to the old Testament than it receives from it ; and the resurrection of Christ alone is sufficient to authenticate the whole sacred volume.

The restoration of a dead body to life is no more difficult to omnipotence, than the production of life at first. The divine operation is in both respects alike incomprehensible : but as we continually observe life to be communicated in a certain way, we call that the law of nature : though we understand not our own meaning, and cannot explain how causes produce their effects. But dead bodies do not return to life, in the ordinary course of human affairs : we therefore suppose some law of nature to the contrary, the violation of which in any particular instance, we should call a miracle ; that is a divine interposition and operation to produce an effect, above or contrary to the general energy of second causes. Some persons indeed pretend that this is impossible : but “ Why should

“ it be thought incredible with you, that God “ should raise the dead ?” The power exerted is no greater, than that by which thousands of infants receive new life every day : and will man presume to say, that God cannot, or shall not, exert his power in any way which they have never before observed ?—If a sufficient reason can be assigned for his extraordinary interposition, and the fact be indisputably proved ; it becomes as credible as other well attested events ; many of which do not coincide with our expectations or ideas of probability.

Universal history, observation, and experience prove that “ the world lieth in wickedness.” Idolatry, superstition, impiety, and every kind of vice and misery, have in all ages, covered and desolated the earth. But it hath pleased God, of his infinite mercy, to reveal himself to sinful men ; to make known a way in which they might be reconciled to him and recovered to holiness ; and thus to introduce a religion suited to rectify the disorders of the world, and unite the honour of his name with the eternal happiness of unnumbered millions. Miracles, and the resurrection of the Redeemer especially, formed a suitable demonstration that this religion came from God, and served to arrest the attention of mankind : for alas ! sinners for the most part are too much occupied about the affairs of this life, to notice those things which relate to God and their eternal state.—

These are reasons assigned for a divine interposition on this occasion ; and more important cannot possibly be conceived.

The Jews, the most inveterate enemies of Christianity, preserve, with profound veneration and scrupulous care, the books of the old Testament, which have been handed down in the same manner from generation to generation, during a long succession of ages. These books evidently contain a system of prophecy, centring in the person and redemption of the Messiah ; and, among other particulars, his sufferings and death are circumstantially foretold, with clear intimations of his resurrection and subsequent glorious kingdom.¹

We know also, that the gospels were made public in the earliest ages of Christianity ; for they are continually quoted and referred to by those writers, whose works have been preserved : and from them we learn, that our Lord predicted his own death and resurrection on the third day, in so explicit a manner, that the Jewish rulers were aware of it, and took their measures accordingly. Yet when the body of Christ was delivered to Joseph, they were so fully satisfied, by what they saw and heard, of his being really dead, that they made no objection on that ground : but they requested Pilate that the sepulchre might be securely closed, and guarded by Roman soldiers, till the the third day was past ; lest the disciples should

¹ Ps. ii. xvi. 8—11. Isai. liii. 10—12.

steal his body, and say that he was risen again. After all their precautions, however, the body was gone, and they were never able to shew by whom it was removed, or what became of it.

Here let us pause, that we may consider the credibility of testimony.—One consistent witness, of sound understanding and fair character, who has no apparent interest in deceiving, is often deemed sufficient to determine the sentence of life or death, the most important of all temporal concerns: but if three or four such witnesses should agree in deposing, that they saw such a murder or robbery committed by the prisoner at the bar; no sober man could doubt of the fact, or scruple to pronounce him guilty. Now there were twelve appointed witnesses to the resurrection of Christ, of plain good understanding, and unexceptionable character: for Peter's denial of his Lord, through the force of sudden temptation, forms no impeachment of his integrity; seeing he so honestly confessed his guilt, and so fully proved the sincerity of his repentance by his subsequent conduct: and when Judas by transgression fell, another was chosen in his place. These witnesses had constantly attended Jesus during some years, and must have been competent to know him from all other men. They were remarkably incredulous respecting his resurrection; and his crucifixion seems almost to have extinguished their hopes: how then can it be supposed, that they would have

attempted to overpower or deceive the vigilant and valiant Roman soldiers, and to steal the body of Jesus? In so desperate an undertaking they must have been sure to excite the combined rage of both the Jewish and Roman rulers: and success itself could only expose them to hatred, persecution, and all kinds of hardships and sufferings. It is manifest, that from the time they began to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ; they renounced all prospects of worldly interest, ease, or greatness; and willingly embraced poverty, labour, contempt, bonds, stripes, and perils as their portion. So that no possible account can be given of their conduct, unless it be ascribed to a principle of conscience: while the strict and exact morality of their writings demonstrates, that they could not be actuated by false principles: for they do not allow men, in any case, to do evil that good may come; and they condemn all kinds of imposition with the most decided severity. Is it then possible for human beings deliberately to choose temporal and eternal misery, and to persevere in decided adherence to a plan, which on their own principles, ensures their damnation in another world, as well as a complication of miseries in this present life?

The witnesses of our Lord's resurrection survived that event for a long time; some of them nearly forty years, and John still more. They were after a while separated into different parts

of the world; and seemed to have no common interest, except in the success of Christianity: they passed through a series of the severest trials, and almost all of them died martyrs in the cause: but no change of circumstance or situation, no promises or threatenings of men, no repeated tortures or impending dangers, induced one of them in the smallest degree, to waver in his testimony. They declared unanimously, that on the third morning after the crucifixion, a vision of angels told some of their company, at the sepulchre, that their Lord was risen; that afterwards they all saw him repeatedly; that they examined his hands, feet, and side, and were sure it was the same body which had been nailed to the cross; that he ate and drank with them several times; that at length, after giving them particular instructions relative to their future conduct, he ascended from among them, till a cloud intercepted their sight of him; and that two angels appearing to them declared he was gone to heaven. Such an unwavering, persevering testimony of twelve persons, whose holy lives, diligent labours, disinterestedness, and patient sufferings evince their sincerity, forms so complete a proof; that in any other case, he who should not be satisfied with it would be deemed sceptical almost to insanity.

This is, however, but a very small part of the evidence afforded us in this most important concern,—Saul the persecutor was a man endued with

superior talents cultivated by education, and possessed of peculiar advantages for rising in the world; of which he was evidently availing himself, while gratifying his implacable enmity to the gospel. Yet was he, all at once, converted into a most zealous preacher of that faith which he had attempted to destroy: and, renouncing all his former principles and worldly prospects, yea, exasperating above measure his powerful patrons and employers; he spent all the remnant of his days in the most self-denying labours, hardships, and sufferings, endured with the greatest alacrity, for the sake of Christ and the gospel: and at length he sealed his testimony with his blood. How can this fact be accounted for, unless we allow the truth of his narrative concerning the manner of his conversion? And if that be allowed, the resurrection of Christ is demonstrated.

In the chapter whence our text is taken, this man declares, that Christ appeared after his resurrection to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remained to that time. This was an appeal to nearly three hundred living witnesses of that event: but no one ever attempted to disprove the truth of his assertion; though false teachers would have concurred with open enemies, in such an attempt, had it been practicable.

The testimony of the apostles, to the resurrection of Jesus, implied a charge of the most complicated wickedness against the rulers of the

Jewish nation: these had the power in their hands, and were every way concerned to vindicate their characters, and punish those who thus accused them. This might readily have been done, had they produced the Roman soldiers in court, to testify that the body of Jesus had been stolen, or to state in what way it was removed from the sepulchre.

But in fact they had bribed the soldiers to circulate a self-contradictory report on this subject, which would not bear investigation: and when St. Matthew soon afterwards charged this publicly upon them, and declared that the story was generally current among the Jews to that time; no one attempted to deny or disprove the charge! In every case of this nature silence must be construed into a confession of guilt: and if the rulers could have accounted for the removal of the body, without either admitting the truth of Matthew's charge, or our Lord's resurrection, no doubt can reasonably be made, but they would have done it in the most publick manner.

Every reflecting person must perceive, that the evidence is completely satisfactory, provided it can be made clear, that these books were published at the time to which they refer. To obviate therefore every doubt on that head, without engaging in an argument far too complicated for this occasion, I would enquire, at what subsequent time it could have been possible to obtain credit to

writings of this description? If a manuscript, said to have been long concealed in some library, be produced or published, as the work of an eminent author, who flourished two or three centuries ago; it immediately is subjected to a severe scrutiny, and imposture in such cases seldom escapes detection. But writings which contain a circumstantial narrative of "things not done in a corner," but in the open view of mankind, during several years; and connected with an epistolary correspondence resulting from them; could never have obtained the least credit in the world, if published after the times referred to, with an express appeal to mankind, that they all along had been familiarly acquainted with them. Such an insolent attempt, to persuade whole nations out of their senses and understandings must have excited universal astonishment and indignation: or had it been possible to convince a few individuals that they had received these books from their ancestors, and been taught from infancy to revere them as the writings of the apostles, when in fact neither they nor any other persons had ever before seen or heard of them; the effrontery of the deceivers and the credulity of the deceived must have constituted an unprecedented event, and marked the age in which it occurred. As therefore no time can be mentioned, when any attempt of this kind is so much as hinted at, by either Christian, Jewish, or Pagan historians; we might be confident, that

the writings in question were extant, and well known in the church, from the very period in which they are said to have been published ; even had we no other evidence. But no impartial man of learning can be imposed upon by pretences of this kind ; having access to abundant proof of another nature that the books of the new testament were extant in the early ages of Christianity : and this argument is principally adduced for the benefit of those, who have neither leisure nor advantages for these investigations.

We should also remember, that on the day of Pentecost, immediately following the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the assembled apostles, with such extraordinary circumstances, as drew together vast multitudes who then resided at Jerusalem. In the presence of all these witnesses they spake, fluently and correctly, in the languages of the several countries, from which their hearers were collected ; though it was certainly known that they had not had the opportunity of learning them : and this stupendous miracle, together with Peter's sermon on the occasion, was made effectual to the conversion of three thousand persons. The gifts of tongues, and of working miracles in the name of Jesus, were ever after continued to them, and were frequently exercised in the most publick and undeniable manner, before numerous witnesses, enemies as well as friends. The same powers were likewise commu-

nicated to many others, by the laying on of the apostles' hands. The time, place, occasion, and circumstances of these extraordinary transactions are frequently specified in their writings. Thus the inhabitants of many cities and countries were appealed to; and the enemies of Christianity were challenged to disprove their pretensions. But none ever attempted to do it: for the Jews themselves do not deny that many extraordinary works were performed by Jesus and his disciples: and the way, in which they try to account for them, demonstrates that from the first their ancestors had nothing plausible to object. In this manner the witnesses and proofs of our Lord's resurrection were multiplied, in almost every part of the vast Roman empire: yea, "God also bare them witness, both with signs, and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." And can any reasonable man suppose, that a general belief could ever have prevailed, through whole nations, of such publick and extraordinary events, without any person attempting to deny them; if they had not actually happened, and been so notorious as to be incontrovertible?

The chosen witnesses of our Lord's resurrection, were likewise the principal writers of the new Testament, and the whole was doubtless written under their inspection. Now in these books prophecies are inserted, which have been accomplishing ever since to the present day. A sceptick

indeed might doubt, whether the predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, were not written after the event : but who can account for other parts of the same prophecy, without allowing that the writer was divinely inspired? “The people shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the gentiles, until the times of the gentiles be fulfilled.” Has not this been actually the case with the Jews and with Jerusalem, during almost eighteen hundred years? Could human sagacity have foreseen such an unparalleled series of events? Or would God have thus confirmed the testimony of impostors? And does not this prophecy, thus wonderfully accomplished, demonstrate the resurrection of Christ, and the truth of Christianity? The coming of the man of sin, with lying miracles, doctrines of demons, worshipping of angels, prohibitions of marriage, and commands to abstain from meat; the impositions, usurpations and persecutions of the Roman antichrist; with various other particulars, were most exactly and circumstantially predicted by the several witnesses of our Lord’s resurrection : and the undeniable accomplishments of these prophecies are so many divine attestations to their testimony, for the satisfaction of all succeeding generations.

The Jewish ritual, or the pagan theology, was intimately connected with the foundations of the

* Luke, xxi. 24.

several governments then existing in the world ; and all the learning, ingenuity, and authority on earth were engaged in their support. Yet a few unarmed, obscure, unlettered men, by preaching a crucified and risen Saviour, in the midst of persecution and sufferings, established Christianity on an immoveable basis ; and their successors, following their example, so wonderfully prevailed, that at length Judaism and Paganism, fell before them ; the religion of Jesus was professed by powerful nations ; and, however corrupted or despised, it subsists to this day ! Whatever men may insinuate concerning the ministers of religion : it is an undeniable fact, that plain preaching, fervent prayers, holy lives, and patient sufferings were the only weapons that the primitive preachers of the gospel opposed to all the authority and learning of the world, which were resolutely employed against them : and yet they decidedly triumphed in a contest apparently so unequal ! A wise man will always allow, that every effect is produced by some adequate cause : but what adequate cause of this astonishing effect can be assigned ; unless we allow that Christianity was of God, and, man could not overthrow it, or prevent its success and triumph ? I will only add, that every instance which at this day occurs, of notoriously wicked persons, converted by the preaching of the gospel from their evil ways, and afterwards walking in newness of life, constitutes a proof that Christ is risen ; that he has all power in heaven

and earth, and is efficaciously present with his faithful servants, “ always even to the end “ of the world.”

We may now I trust confidently say, that no other past event was ever proved by such an accumulated body of evidence. Who doubts whether Alexander conquered Darius? or Julius Cæsar, Pompey? Yet who can produce the tenth part of the proof in respect of these events, which hath even at this time been stated of our Lord’s resurrection? But men can believe that Alexander conquered Darius, without either parting with their sins, or feeling uneasiness of conscience: while the truth of the gospel is very alarming to all, who walk according to the course of the world, and neglect the salvation of Christ.

It would be difficult to find out any satisfactory method, of further attesting the Redeemer’s resurrection, which could have possibly been devised. For had he openly appeared to the whole Jewish people; and had they with one accord embraced Christianity; the gentiles would naturally have considered it as a concerted plan to aggrandize the nation: and had the Jews, through excessive pride and prejudice, still persisted in unbelief and opposition; the gospel would have laboured under additional disadvantages in other countries: and future ages could at last have had no other human testimony, than that of the individuals whose writings should have been transmitted to them.—

In short, should the Lord grant the presumptuous demand of those, who refuse to believe without the testimony of their own senses; and should the Saviour appear to every individual through successive generations; how could men *be sure*, that this was the identical person crucified on mount Calvary? or how *demonstrate* that the transient vision was not an illusion? Universal uncertainty and doubt must therefore be the consequence, of rejecting such unanswerable and multiplied evidences, as the Lord hath mercifully vouchsafed us, of that great event which we this day commemorate.

II. We proceed to shew what inferences may be deduced from the subject before us.

It would be the grossest inconsistency, and the most absurd trifling, to contend earnestly that Christ is risen, and then overlook or deny the peculiar doctrines, which his resurrection was intended to authenticate. We infer therefore from our subject that Jesus is indeed the Son of God, "One with the Father," "God manifest in the flesh." On account of various expressions, which he used in speaking of himself, he was charged with blasphemy, and with making himself *equal with God*. For this crime he was condemned by Caiaphas and the Jewish council; who said before the Roman governor, "We have a

“ law, and by our law he ought to die, because
 “ he made himself the Son of God.”¹ The cen-
 turion who attended his crucifixion could not but
 know for what crime he suffered: when therefore
 he witnessed the miracles which accompanied his
 death, he cried, “ Truly this was the Son of God.”
 “ Certainly this was a righteous person.” When
 incredulous Thomas was at length convinced that
 Christ was risen from the dead; all that he had
 before heard, seen, believed, or hoped, seems at
 once to have rushed into his mind; and he ex-
 claimed in adoration, “ My Lord, and my God!”
 Thus was Jesus “ declared to be the Son of God
 “ with power,—by the resurrection from the
 “ dead.” He was demonstrated to be the pro-
 mised Messiah, the Seed of the woman, the Seed
 of Abraham, the Son of David, Emmanuel, “ the
 “ mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince
 “ of peace,” “ JEHOVAH our Righteousness;”
 and whatever the prophets from the beginning had
 spoken concerning the expected glorious Re-
 deemer.—All that he had spoken of himself was
 likewise thus fully proved to be true: it now was
 manifest, that he was warranted to say “ I and
 “ my Father are One:” “ He that hath seen me
 “ hath seen the Father:” “ Before Abraham was I
 “ AM:” “ I am the Way, and the Truth, and
 “ the Life: no man cometh to the Father, but by
 “ me:” “ No man knoweth the Father but the
 “ Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him:”

¹ John xix. 7.

“ I am the Light of the world:” “ I am the
 “ Resurrection and the Life.” “ If any man
 “ thirst let him come unto me and drink:” “ The
 “ Father judgeth no man, but hath committed
 “ all judgment to the Son; that all men should
 “ honour the Son, even as they honour the Fa-
 “ ther. He that honoureth not the Son honour-
 “ eth not the Father that sent him.” In short the
 resurrection of Christ not only demonstrates the
 truth of Christianity, but the infallible certainty
 of all its doctrines, and authenticates the whole
 scripture as *divinely inspired*. His testimony
 proves it in respect of the old Testament; and
 the new was written by his chosen witnesses, and
 attested by all the miracles which they wrought
 in his name. So that the Lord now speaks to us
 in every part of scripture, as far as it respects
 our dispensation and suits our case, with as much
 authority as he did to Israel from mount Sinai;
 but with words of mercy and grace, instead of ter-
 ror and dismay.

For if Christ be risen from the dead, then is his
 atonement accepted. “ He died for our sins and
 “ rose again for our justification.” He was, as it
 were, arrested for our debt, and cast into the pri-
 son of the grave: but as full payment had been
 made, he was speedily liberated. ‘ Having over-
 ‘ come the sharpness of death, he hath opened the
 ‘ kingdom of heaven to all believers.’ The founda-
 tion of our hopes is now surely laid: the way of

access to a throne of grace is now made manifest ; for the risen Saviour is also ascended into the heavens to appear in the presence of God for us ; and “ he is able to save to the uttermost all them that come to God by him ; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

The resurrection of Christ assures us, that “ all power in heaven and earth are given to him ;” and that “ he is made Head over all things to his church.” “ He both died, and rose again, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the living and the dead.” “ Angels, principalities, and powers are made subject to him ;” “ he has the keys of death and hell.” “ He is King of kings and Lord of lords :” all nature obeys him : all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are laid up in him ; he has unsearchable riches, and invincible power : the fulness of the Spirit resides in him : “ All the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily.” “ He is become the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him :” and “ he must reign till all his enemies are made his footstool.”—It is therefore no light matter that we are considering. “ Yet,” saith JEHOVAH, “ I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.—“ Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish.” Every individual must either bow to the sceptre of his grace, or be broken in pieces by the iron rod of his omnipotent indignation.¹

¹ 2 Thes. i. 8—10.

We are also taught that true Christians are conformed to Christ, in his death, resurrection, and ascension. By motives and grace derived from their crucified and risen Redeemer, they die to their former hopes, pleasures, and pursuits: their sensibility to temporal things is deadened: carnal self-love, the main-spring of their activity in past times, is broken: “ They are crucified with Christ; nevertheless they live; yet not they, but Christ liveth in them.” They “ know him and the power of his resurrection:” new principles, feelings, and actuating motives are communicated. “ They account themselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God;” “ They live no longer to themselves, but to him that died for them and rose again:” “ they are risen with Christ, and seek those things which are above.” “ Their conversation is in heaven;” and in proportion to the degree of their faith and grace, they ascend and reign with Christ, in the nature of their joys and the temper of their hearts. Thus they are prepared, whenever they leave this world, to share that “ fulness of joy, and those pleasures, which are at God’s right hand for evermore.”

As our risen Redeemer ever liveth and reigneth in heaven, to manage all the concerns of his people, and make all ready for their reception; we may adopt with exulting joy the apostle’s words: “ If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more being

“reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.¹” “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? it is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea, rather, is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us.—” “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”² Surely our Friend, who died, and rose again for us, will take care that none shall pluck us out of his hands, and will come at death to “receive us to himself, that where he is, there we may be also.”

Finally, as Christ is risen from the dead, he “is become the First-fruits of them that slept.”—“The hour cometh, when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life: and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.” At that awful period, he will ascend his tribunal, finally to separate his people from his enemies: and “these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.” The bodies of the wicked will be rendered incorruptible, and capable of enduring the vengeance reserved for them, “where *their* worm dieth not, and *their* fire is not quenched.³” And those of the righteous will be raised spiritual and immortal, and fitted to participate the holy joys of heaven. “The Saviour,

v. 10. ² Rom. viii. 33—35. ³ Mark, ix. 48—50.

“ the Lord Jesus, shall change our vile body, that
 “ it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body,
 “ according to the working whereby he is able
 “ even to subdue all things unto himself.¹” In
 this prospect, the believer, when strong in faith,
 may adopt the apostle’s words and say, “ O Death,
 “ where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy vic-
 “ tory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength
 “ of sin is the law: but thanks be unto God, who
 “ giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus
 “ Christ.”

III. We conclude with a few hints by way of application.

It may be useful, especially to young persons, to contemplate the prevailing scepticism and infidelity of the age, in connexion with the subject we have been considering. God hath vouchsafed us a revelation of himself, and of his will concerning us, authenticated in the most unanswerable manner, most beneficial in its nature and tendency, and exactly suited to our circumstances: yet this revelation is opposed, reviled, or ridiculed, by numbers who pretend to *virtue*; and affirm that unbelief, *at most*, can only be a harmless error, neither very criminal nor dangerous.—But the scripture speaks a very different language. We read of “ an evil heart of unbelief, in departing

¹ Phil. iii. 20, 21.

“from the living God.” Our Lord says, “How can ye believe who seek honour one of another?”—“Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.” Unbelief therefore is the offspring of ambition, love of sin, and dislike to God and holiness. It rejects the remedy, which everlasting wisdom and mercy have provided for our miseries; it makes God a liar; it despises his grace, and defies his power and justice; and is therefore inseparably connected with eternal damnation.—“Let no man deceive you with vain words.” Men oppose the scripture because it opposes their favourite pursuits; and denounces an awful sentence against all who do not humbly repent, believe the gospel, and become the faithful subjects of the holy Jesus. They do not in reality need more evidence; but a more unprejudiced, teachable, and spiritual mind. “If they believe not Moses and the prophets,” or the apostles and evangelists; “neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” Beseech the Lord therefore to remove from you ‘all hardness of heart, and contempt of his word and commandment;’ “to open your understandings that you may understand the scriptures;” and “to give you repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; that you may recover yourselves out of the snare of the devil, who takes sinners captive at his will.”

But beware also of a dead faith ; which may keep men in the way of instruction, but is wholly unavailing to salvation. The faith demanded by our Lord is a living active principle : it receives him for all those purposes, which he came into the world to effect ; it applies to him, depends on him, and follows his directions : and “ working by “ love,” “ purifying the heart,” and “ overcoming “ the world,” it produces unreserved obedience to Christ, and careful imitation of his most perfect example.

The subject before us is peculiarly suited to the burdened conscience and desponding heart of those, who are “ poor and of a contrite spirit, and “ tremble at God’s word.” Did the Son of God so love and pity proud obstinate rebels and enemies, as to give himself a sacrifice on the cross for their sins ? And will he, now on his glorious throne, refuse to stretch forth his powerful arm, to rescue the humble penitent who earnestly supplicates his mercy ? No, my brethren, he delights to save. Come to him, wait on him, wait in the appointed means, and you shall soon know the power of his resurrection, the depth of his condescension, and the riches of his grace.

But if we have tasted that the Lord is gracious : and can rejoice in having such a Representative and Advocate, to manage our concerns in heaven : let us remember, that we are honoured to be his representatives on earth ; to shew the excellency

of his religion by our example ; to be useful to his redeemed people, and to promote his cause in the world. Let us then ask ourselves whether Paul, when constrained by the love of Christ, would have declined any service, as too mean, laborious, self-denying, expensive, or perilous, which the command and honour of his Lord called him to perform ? And whether he would not have more fully improved even *our* talents and advantages, than we have hitherto done ? Let us review our conduct, and consider what ability or opportunity we have of honotiring Christ among men ; let us reflect on our obligations and prospects ; and see to it, that our lights be burning and our loins girded, that when he cometh we may be found watching, and employed in a proper manner.— And “ may the God of peace, who brought
“ again from the dead the great Shepherd of
“ the sheep ; through the blood of the everlasting
“ covenant ; make us perfect in every good work
“ to do his will ; working in us that which is well-
“ pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ. To
“ whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

SERMON XXI.¹

ISAIAH, xxxii. 15.

Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the evangelical prophet foretels the auspicious advent and benign government of the Messiah; perhaps with some reference to Hezekiah's equitable and prosperous reign over Judah. He then denounces sentence on the careless, obstinate, and unbelieving Jews, in language aptly descriptive of their condition, ever since the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans: and then he declares, that these desolations would endure, "until the Spirit should be poured upon them from on high;" the happy effects of which gracious dispensation he predicts in the most energetick language. This seems to be the prophetic meaning of the chapter; the concluding verses of which have not hitherto received their accomplishment.—But the present

¹ Preached on Whitsunday, 1794.

occasion fixes our attention to the words of the text: and I shall endeavour from them,

I. To explain what is meant by “the pouring out of the Spirit from on high.”

II. To consider more particularly the nature and effects of this promised blessing.

III. To make some remarks on the emphatical word “Until.”

IV. To point out some instructions more immediately arising from the subject.

I. I would explain the words here used.

The apostle calls Christianity “the ministration of the Spirit:”¹ and it is certain, however it may be overlooked, that the promise of the Spirit pervades the new Testament, in the same manner as that of a Messiah does the old. The language used concerning this subject, evidently implies the *Personality* and *Deity* of the Holy Spirit. He is represented as *hearing, speaking, willing, commanding, forbidding*, and as *receiving, and executing, a commission*: and this not in allegories and parables, but in histories, didactic discussions, laws, and grants, where precision is in-

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 8.

dispensably necessary, and a literal interpretation peculiarly suitable: yet beyond all doubt these are *personal* actions. At the same time divine perfections and operations are ascribed to him: He is said to dwell in the hearts of all believers, as in his temple, to “search the deep things of God,” to raise the dead, and to effect a new creation.— He is called, “the Spirit of holiness,” “the Spirit of truth,” “the Spirit of life,” “the Spirit of power,” “the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge,” “the eternal Spirit,” and “the Comforter.” If then the Holy Spirit be a Person possessing divine perfections, and performing divine operations; and if the same be true of the Father, and of the Son also: the ancient doctrine of the Trinity is evidently scriptural, though we can neither explain nor comprehend so deep a mystery.

If we further examine the subject, we shall find, that the scriptures uniformly ascribe all miraculous powers, prophecy, and inspiration to the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit: so that the wonderful works of Christ himself, and the exercise of his mediatorial offices on earth, are spoken of as performed by his anointing: “The Holy Ghost was not given by measure unto him:”¹ and St. Paul particularly describes the diversity of gifts communicated “by the same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he willed.”² The predictions of the prophets concerning the pouring

¹ John, iii. 34. Acts, i. 2. x. 38.

² 1 Cor. xii.

out of the Spirit, in the days of the Messiah,¹ as well as our Lord's promises to his disciples, may have a special reference to these extraordinary gifts and powers; and to that display of the ascended Redeemer's glory and majesty, which was made on the day of Pentecost: but it should also be noted, that effects were produced, at that important season, by the same divine Agent, which were far more valuable to those by whom they were experienced.

If we accurately study the language of the sacred oracles, we shall be convinced that the Holy Spirit is there spoken of, as the immediate Author of all that is holy and excellent in man: and that a spiritual death, and a total incapacity of delighting in God and heavenly things, universally prevail in the human heart; till "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from the law of sin and death." "Except a man be born again—born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see—he cannot enter into, the kingdom of God." He is "the Spirit of wisdom, and revelation in the knowledge of God, to enlighten the eyes of our understanding, that we may know the hope of our calling."² He "convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment:" "he glorifies Christ, for he receives of his, and shews it unto us." It is his office to "teach us all things, and lead us into all truth."

¹ Isai. xliv. 3. Joel, ii. 28.

² Eph. i. 17, 18.

Christians are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit to obedience:” they abound in hope “through the power of the Holy Ghost.” “They pray *in* and *by* the Holy Ghost, who helps their infirmities:” “they are led by the Spirit,” and all their holy tempers and actions are “the fruits of the Spirit.” So that, “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his:” for all his redeemed people are “sealed by the Spirit who is the earnest of their inheritance:” as “the Spirit of adoption, he witnesses with their spirits that they are the children of God:” and thus he becomes their all-sufficient Comforter; “for the kingdom of God is—in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

In these respects we are warranted to expect the pouring out of the Spirit on our souls and congregations: and we are confident that all true Christians are “the temple of the Holy Ghost, an habitation of God through the Spirit;” and we are amazed that any man, who calls himself a disciple of Christ, should be so ignorant, as to deny this fundamental truth of the gospel, or so profane as to turn it into ridicule! “If ye,” says our Lord, “being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” This accords to the promise of the Lord by his prophet, “I will put my

¹ Luke xi. 13.

“ Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.”

Far be it from us to affect equality with prophets and apostles: nor do we expect any new revelations: for the scriptures soberly interpreted are the standard of truth. But we profess, to depend on the Holy Spirit to enable us properly to understand them. We have no other rule of duty, but the commandments of God: but we need the promised teaching and assistance of the Holy Spirit, to enable us to understand this rule, to convince us of our manifold deviations from it, to humble and soften our hearts in true repentance, to encourage our hope of mercy and help us to apply for it, and to strengthen us for renewed obedience. We do not pretend to know that our sins are pardoned; except as we are conscious that we hate and abhor them, and humbly trust in Christ to deliver us from them. We infer our interest in the love of God as our heavenly Father, from our love to him as his adopted children; and from an habitual desire of living to his glory, obeying his commandments, and doing good to our brethren for his sake.

Surely no man, who professes to reverence the scriptures will call this enthusiasm! We disclaim all pretensions to predict future events, or to discover things unknown to others by any immediate

revelation from God ; yea, we protest against them, as derogatory to the holy scriptures and a disgrace to the gospel ; and even the incautious language of some well-meaning persons, meets with decided disapprobation from others, who hold most of the same doctrines ; because it is capable of being perverted or misunderstood.

These remarks having been premised, I observe, that as all spiritual religion is produced by the influences of the Holy Spirit, and every degree of success attending the gospel of Christ must be ascribed to a few drops, as it were, of this fertilizing rain ; so, there are seasons, in which the Spirit is *poured* from on high in copious showers, upon some favoured spots of the Lord's vineyard. This was most remarkably the case on the day of Pentecost, and for a considerable time afterwards : and though the effects were gradually diminished ; yet neither the communication of miraculous gifts, nor the abundant converting and sanctifying influences accompanying the preaching of the gospel, ceased, till perhaps more than two centuries afterwards. Such an outpouring of the Spirit attended the labours of the reformers, in the time of Luther, and for many years after his death. Nor has our land been left wholly destitute of this special benefit during the present century : and some places seem yet to be favoured with it in a considerable degree. In short, they, who are conversant with the records of the church, ancient or

modern, will recollect various seasons, when, in different places, the Spirit of God was poured upon his people from on high: and all these should be considered as earnest of more abundant blessings, when the fulness of the gentiles shall be brought into the church; and the Jews “shall look to him whom they have pierced,” uniting penitent tears with believing supplications.¹

II. We proceed to consider more particularly the nature and effects of this promised blessing.

In order to elucidate the subject, we must advert to the present state of the church and of the world. If we look among the constituted ministers of religion; we cannot but perceive, that vast numbers consider their profession, in great measure, as a secular employment, and pursue their worldly interests by it, like other orders in the community; without any proportionable earnestness in seeking the salvation of souls, and the advancement of genuine Christianity. Many indeed are very learned and ingenious: but alas! they embrace and contend for doctrines, which certainly were deduced from a very different source, than the sacred scriptures. Others preach several of the great truths of the gospel, but seem little concerned to apply them to the hearts and consciences of mankind; or to excite them, by fervent exhor-

¹ Zech. xii. 10—14.

tations and a bright example, to “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.” A few indeed appear to be honestly and simply engaged in the most useful work of their sacred function : yet perhaps the skilfulness, boldness, self-denial, diligence, zeal, and faithfulness, even of this remnant, fall much beneath the degree which “men of like passions” have at more favoured seasons been known to display.

These things should not be considered as a censure of modern times : for the case has been nearly the same, in almost every age and part of the church. No external appointment to the ministry, no engagement or mode of worship, can, by its own efficacy, dethrone the selfishness of the human heart ; or induce the carnally-minded to act from pure motives, and to delight in the spiritual service of the Redeemer. But when “the Spirit shall be poured upon us from on high ;” we may expect, that such ministers, as have feebly sought the glory of God in the salvation of souls, will feel their hearts enlarge with more abundant zeal and love ; and that a vast accession will be made to their wisdom, and knowledge of Christ and his holy doctrine. They will probably be to a great degree delivered from the fear of men ; raised above the love of the world ; emancipated from a bigotted regard to systems and parties ; filled with most tender compassion to perishing sinners, and fervent love to their brethren ; occupied with realiz-

ing views of eternal things; prepared for perilous and self-denying services; and disposed cordially to unite with their fellow-labourers in promoting the common cause; without regard to competition, personal interest, or reputation.

Those who have preached the truths of the gospel, without application or animation, will then probably feel and insist upon their practical tendency, and manifest it in their own conduct. Some, who have been adverse to the truth, will be won over to preach the faith which once they opposed: loiterers and hirelings will be converted into faithful, diligent, able, and disinterested pastors: many labourers will be sent forth into the vineyard; and every one who partakes of these fertilizing showers, will "take heed to the ministry which he hath received of the Lord, that he fulfil it."

The change which took place, even in the apostles themselves, after the descent of the Holy Ghost, with the conduct of the primitive ministers of the gospel, and the exhortations addressed to them in the New Testament, abundantly warrant these expectations.

If we next survey the mass of people called Christians, and observe their disposition and conduct: we shall readily understand what effects would be produced by the pouring out of the Spirit upon us. Let us, for instance, consider the inhabitants of this city, and their behaviour in

respect of the Lord's day, the publick worship, and the preaching of the gospel. We shall in this review see cause to lament, that vast multitudes retire into the country for irreligious recreation, or employ the holy sabbath in travelling; that crowds assemble in places of intemperate indulgence, or frivolous amusement; and that many spend part of the day in adjusting some worldly business, and the residue in sloth or festivity. A few, compared with the whole immense number, attend at the several places of publick worship; the majority of whom, it is to be feared, having paid their weekly tribute, think no more about it; being "as a man who dreameth that he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty." Others frequent the places where the word of God is preached, with considerable regularity; but continue hearers only, and not doers. In short, few comparatively seem to receive the "gospel, not as the word of man, but as—the word of God, which effectually worketh in them that believe;" or "to worship him in spirit and truth:" and even these see cause to lament their want of zeal and fervency; and too often manifest a languor and a defect in earnestness and activity, where the glory of God, and the benefit of mankind are concerned.

But if "the Spirit were poured upon us from on high:" the hearts of such persons would expand with holy affections, and be filled with divine consolations. They would become fervent in every re-

religious duty, and earnest in prayer for their ministers and brethren, and for a blessing on every attempt to propagate the gospel; they would bestow pains to impress the instructions of scripture on the minds of their children, relatives, and servants; to recommend the truth by their example, and to enforce it in their conversation: They would say to those, with whom they had any influence, “Come ye, and let us go to the house of God, and he will teach us of his way, and we will walk in his paths.”¹ And, as Andrew brought Peter, and Philip Nathanael, to an acquaintance with Christ; they would endeavour, by letters, books, and all other means in their power, to lead such as had been unacquainted with the gospel, to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and into the way of life and salvation.

At such a season formal worshippers would find their hearts engaged in a new manner, to attend on the ordinances of God: and many of them would become true believers. Those who had imbibed false doctrines, would perceive that God was of a truth present in our congregations, and be induced to join themselves to us: a general attention and enquiry would be raised; and “the Lord would daily add unto the church such as should be saved.”

In this manner, it has frequently been known, that great multitudes, through large districts, have

¹ Isai. ii. 3.

in a short time been brought to consider their ways: the veil that hides God and eternal things from men's minds, has been apparently rent; and more done in bringing men to receive the gospel and to walk in newness of life, during a few months, than the very same ministers had been able to accomplish in the course of many preceding years. These effects are also proved to be genuine by their permanency, and by the holy lives of numbers; after the first vehement affections, and the remarkable circumstances, of such revivals, have ceased. Thus the thousands that were converted, when the Spirit was poured out on the day of pentecost, "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship;" they "were of one heart;" they "had all things in common," and "great grace was upon them all." But when a religious commotion arises from enthusiasm, false principles, and selfish affections; it often leaves men more immoral and ungodly than they were before.

Again, if we consider the more pious part of our congregations; how often have we reason to lament, there is no more union and affection among them! and that they are kept at so great a distance from each other, by their stations in life; their different employments, talents, and dispositions; or even by trivial resentments, suspicions, and prejudices! But the blessing, of which we speak, would deliver Christians from such contracted and selfish passions: and they would be ready, without

hesitation, cordially to forgive all who had offended them, to make concessions and amends to those whom they had injured, and to seek reconciliation with every one, who had been in any respect alienated from them. An increase of divine illumination and brotherly love would terminate or moderate our differences of opinion; men would less regard the trivial disparity of outward rank, except as it reminded them of their several duties: they would readily unite in social worship and profitable conversation: and in proportion as these sacred influences rested on their souls, they would abound in self-denying beneficence, and in active endeavours to supply the wants of the indigent, to soothe the anguish of the afflicted, and to alleviate the miseries of mankind. An attentive meditation on the apostolical exhortations, and the conduct of the primitive Christians, may suffice to convince us, that these must be the effects of the pouring out of the Spirit upon any congregation, city, or country: for indeed "the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance."

Should we advert to the state of religion more at large; we should find, that the remnant which professes the leading truths of Christianity, and appears to be influenced by them, is lamentably divided into parties, about subordinate points of doctrine, or matters of discipline and government. So that, if we could collect together the whole

company of real believers; we should find them very discordant in their sentiments, and disposed to magnify the importance of their several particularities: and it would be extremely difficult, if not wholly impossible, to unite them in religious services, or in the same plan for promoting the common cause. On the contrary, it would hardly be practicable, to exclude subjects of doubtful disputation; or to prevent such contests and mutual censures, as only serve to furnish the enemies of the gospel with plausible objections. Alas, this is an evident proof, that, as the apostle expresses it, "we are yet carnal,"¹ however orthodox our creed may be, or how zealously soever we contend for it! "Hereby," says our Lord, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another."

But when "the Spirit shall be poured upon us from on high," all, "who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity," will "love one another with a pure heart fervently." The pride and selfish passions, which occasion disputes, will be mortified; the minds of Christians will be more fully illuminated; the harmony of scripture will be better understood; the comparative value of every part of religion will be more clearly ascertained; and men will be rendered more humbly sensible of their fallibility, and more disposed to candour and patience. Thus, while a most desirable progress

¹ 1 Cor. iii. 3, 4.

will be made, in regulating every thing according to the standard of truth: Christians will be delivered in great measure from the propensity to judge or despise their brethren; and will learn to “receive one another, even as Christ receiveth them, to the glory of God.” The pouring out of the Spirit will effect, what acts of uniformity, conciliatory schemes, or philosophical candour can never accomplish: for it will bring Christians, through whole countries, “with one mind and one mouth to glorify God:” to form one Church, professing the same fundamental doctrines; harmoniously joining in the same worship, and the celebration of the same ordinances; and zealously concurring to promote the conversion of Mahometans, Jews, and Pagans, to scriptural Christianity.

These happy effects are predicted by the prophets, under various significant representations; of which it may suffice at present to produce a single specimen. “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox: and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy

“ mountain: for the earth shall be full of the
 “ knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the
 “ sea.¹”

These are some of the effects which will proportionably follow, whenever the Spirit is poured out upon the church. Many others might be mentioned, did brevity permit; and some of them will come before us, in the subsequent part of the subject.

III. Then we proceed to make some remarks on the emphatical word, “ Until.”

A variety of plans are continually proposed and adopted, to meliorate the condition of mankind, and to guard at the same time against tyranny in the rulers, and turbulency in the multitude. No doubt something may be done in this way to render the state of the world more tolerable, than it would otherwise be: for, while civil government in general is *God's ordinance*, the peculiar arrangement of it is left in great measure to human prudence; and it may therefore be also called *the ordinance of man.*²” But, too sanguine expectations are formed, when changes take place, or when supposed improvements are made; and speedy disappointment is the consequence. The world after all, remains full of oppression or sedition: the

¹ Isai. xi. 6—9. xli. 18—20. xliv. 3—5.

² Rom. xiii. 2. 1 Pet. ii. 13.

rulers and people generally continue unchanged in character, whatever external changes take place: and selfishness produces its effects, after all the efforts which are made to counteract it; even as poison retains its destructive efficacy, in whatever form it is administered. This will in great measure continue to be the case, "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high," to renew men's hearts to the divine image in holy love: and then, they will delight in equity, goodness, mercy, and peace, after the example of our holy God; which will render human society as happy, as it is now too often miserable.

Again, the earth hath in every age been a field of blood; and the vast proportion of our race, which has perished by the sword, almost exceeds credibility or calculation: nor can the compassionate mind reflect on the subject without horror and amazement. The causes of this deplorable fact have been sought for, in the different forms of government; and in the ambition of men distinguished by certain titles, or invested with authority in some peculiar manner. Yet the disposition to delight in war seems to have been common to governors of all descriptions: and the sacred writers, characterizing the ungodly, say, "Their feet are swift to shed blood." Universal history is the best comment on this text: all the genius of mankind, however diversified, has combined to celebrate successful warriors. The original

murderer has appeared in this respect especially to be the god of this world: Mars, Bellona, and even Minerva, (the poet's emblem of prudence in war,) are the names under which polite nations have worshipped him: and unnumbered millions of human victims have been immolated at his shrine, by his renowned priests, who have emulated his ambition and malignity, and shared the adoration which he received. Thus it will be in a great measure, "until the Spirit be poured upon us from "on high." Ambition, resentment, rapacity, and interfering interests will continue to excite mankind to war: and both the mighty and the mean will, in general, deem this one of the most honourable and desirable of employments; till those happy times arrive, which are predicted in the scriptures, when "the nations shall beat their swords into plow-shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; and they shall learn war no more." But every degree of that sacred influence will, in the mean while, produce proportionably the same happy consequences.

It is likewise grievous to reflect on the severities, which are necessary to maintain peace and order in the community.—On the numbers deprived of life, immured in dungeons, and banished to remote and desolate regions, that others may live in security. While the silent ravages of licentiousness appear even still more dreadful, to those who have the opportunity, or are under the painful necessity,

of investigating them. The wisdom and assiduity of men are well employed, in attempting to abate these dire mischiefs: but no effectual remedy will be applied, “until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high.” Then the divine law will be written in men’s hearts; and justice, benevolence, and universal temperance, implanted in the soul, will infallibly rectify these disorders, which are incurable by all other means.

—We cannot reflect on the condition, in which the nations remain to this day; without lamenting, that so large a proportion of the earth is still covered with pagan darkness, Mahometan delusion, or Jewish incredulity. The ignorance, superstition, and wickedness of nominal Christians; the prevalence of antisciptural tenets even in the protestant churches; and the rapid progress of impiety, infidelity, and atheism, present a very gloomy prospect to the mind of a true believer. And when we consider the immense difficulties of remedying these evils, and the inadequate effects of the most laudable efforts; we are ready to sit down in despair. We should, however, remember that every degree of success far more than counterbalances the expence or labour of our exertions: and that we must not expect to make very rapid progress, “until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high.” —But then mountains will flow down at the presence of the Lord; nations will be born in a day: a new creation will prepare men’s hearts to welcome

the gospel: all other difficulties will vanish or be surmounted; and “the earth be filled with the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

The various abuses, divisions, scandals, and false doctrines, which prevail among such as shew more regard to scriptural Christianity, will not be counteracted; nor will that revival of the power of godliness in our congregations, which every friend of evangelical truth must ardently desire, be effectually introduced, “till the Spirit be poured upon us from on high.” So that this is the grand *desideratum*: the only adequate remedy for all the evils we witness or hear of, in the church and in the world. Till our prayers, in this respect be answered, we shall see on every side most lamentable disorders, which we cannot rectify; and few in comparison will be found, who have ability or zeal for making such arduous attempts: but this expected event will raise up and qualify instruments for every kind of service; dispose the minds of multitudes cordially to unite in vigorous exertions; and render their endeavours rapidly and extensively successful.

IV. Then I proceed to point out some instructions, more immediately arising from the subject.

How ignorant must they be, as to the very first

principles of Christianity, who treat our professed dependence on the Holy Spirit, and experience of his sacred influences, with supercilious contempt! A Jew of old, would not have been more profanely absurd, in ridiculing the expectation of a Messiah as fanaticism. Even if uninspired men could, by their superior talents, improve upon the oracles of God, (as some of them seem arrogantly disposed to think they can) this would no more supersede the necessity of divine influences, than modern improvements in agriculture render the fertilizing showers and the genial warmth of the sun unnecessary. Even the preaching of Him, "who spake as never "man spake," was rendered effectual by the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit; without which, Paul would have planted, and Apollos watered in vain. No wonder then, that such teachers as deny, deride, explain away, or even keep out of sight, the promised influences of the Holy Spirit, harangue the people in weekly lectures, from year to year, without witnessing or even expecting, any great effect. While men depend on their own rationality, ingenuity, or eloquence, and dishonour the divine Spirit; we may be sure that the Lord will frown upon the presumptuous attempt, and blast all their vain endeavours. Indeed no man is warranted to expect success, even in preaching the pure gospel of Christ; except as he simply relies on the Holy Spirit to assist and prosper his labours, uses the proper means of obtaining his

powerful co-operation, and explicitly gives him all the glory.

“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Unless, therefore, we possess some evidence in our own hearts, that we are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we cannot, without manifest presumption, expect that the Judge of the world will, at the last day, own us as his true disciples: but this cannot be known to us, except by the effects produced on our views, dispositions, affections, and conduct. Humiliation for sin, faith, love of Christ and his people, compassion for sinners, a spiritual mind, and an habitual aim to glorify God and do good to men, are the genuine effects produced by the Spirit of God dwelling in us. Can it then be *rational* to overlook those scriptures which speak on these subjects? or to expect the eternal felicity promised to Christians, while destitute of those things which are declared essential to Christianity?

Again, would we prosper in our own souls, or succeed in endeavouring to do good in our families, connexions, and situations; we must adhere to the doctrines and precepts of scripture; pray with fervent importunity for the influences of the Spirit; and be very careful not to grieve him, or to quench that sacred fire which he kindles in the believing heart. If we have hitherto been remarkably unsuccessful; we should seriously enquire, on what account the Lord contends with us? And especially

we should examine, whether we have not depended on our own supposed abilities, or sought our own honour; instead of relying simply on the Holy Spirit, with a readiness of mind to ascribe to him all the glory of every successful attempt?

They who would enjoy the benefit of an able and faithful ministry, should be instant in prayer for their pastors. If this were more attended to, we should doubtless be enabled to ‘set forth the true and lively word of God, both by our preaching and living,’ with far greater effect; and should be in all respects much more useful.—But our fervent supplications should not be confined to those, with whom we are more immediately connected; for we ought to pray continually for the “pouring out of the Spirit from on high,” upon every part of the visible church, and upon all orders and descriptions of men throughout the world. This should constitute a *prominent* part of our daily prayers, in our closets and families; and enter particularly into the various circumstances, in which mankind are placed. We ought to intreat the Lord, to render all his ministers faithful, holy, and successful; to send forth labourers into his harvest; to unite all Christians in the bonds of brotherly love; to prosper all means used for the conversion of Jews, Mahometans, Pagans, or infidels; and to “fill the earth with truth and righteousness.”

We shall not probably live to witness this

glorious scene: yet the Lord may bless some means which we use, in making way for that grand triumph of his cause. Thus David zealously prepared materials for the temple, though assured it would not be built in his day. If we have little else in our power, either to serve our generation, or to sow seed for the good of posterity; we may perform an important service by our persevering prayers: and whenever the Lord shall "pour out his Spirit from on high," to make his gospel victorious over all opposition; his people will certainly go forth to meet him with their united fervent supplications.

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PRAYERS.

A Morning Prayer for a Family.

O most glorious and gracious God, whose kind providence has protected us through the night, and brought us in peace to meet together this morning; assist us, we earnestly beseech thee, to present our unfeigned praises and thanksgivings, and to unite in fervent prayer and supplication before thy mercy-seat.

But, who are we, O thou high and lofty One, who inhabitest eternity, whose name is Holy, that we should venture into thy awful presence? Even the Seraphim veil their faces in deep humility, when they present their adorations before thy throne—And we are not only immensely beneath them in our nature; but alas, we have been guilty of base ingratitude for thy bounties, and of multiplied acts of rebellion against thee, our Creator and Sovereign—"We have forsaken thee, the Fountain of

“living waters,” to seek happiness from the broken cisterns of earthly enjoyments and possessions!—We have proudly rejected thy easy yoke, and become slaves to divers lusts and pleasures!—We have refused thee that reasonable tribute of worship and love, which it would have been our privilege to render! We have broken thy commandments in thought, word, and deed, and have abused thy gifts to the dishonour of thy name.

Thus we would with shame confess, we are fallen under condemnation and into bondage, from which we cannot deliver our own souls: and we may well be confounded, when we would lift up our hearts unto thee. “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquity, O LORD, who can stand? But “there is forgiveness with thee,” and plenteous redemption in thy beloved Son. Through his atoning sacrifice, and prevailing intercession, we would approach thy throne of grace; and while we smite on our breasts, and say, “God be merciful to us, vile sinners!” we would unite our penitent confessions with lively faith and hope, and bless thee for these unspeakable benefits. Oh give us true repentance and living faith; convince us more deeply of our sinfulness; and discover to us every thing in our hearts and lives, which displeases thee: that we may approach thee in genuine poverty of spirit, and with sincere and fervent longings after those blessings which we ask with our lips. Enlighten our understandings,

that we may more clearly perceive the nature and glory of thy gospel; and more fully “know thee, “the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou “hast sent.” Teach us to count all things but loss, that we may win Christ, and partake of his salvation.—May thy holy word, which we daily study, be treasured up in our memories, written in our hearts, and made legible in our tempers and conduct. Oh, do thou rectify our mistakes, deliver us from prejudices, “make us to be of “good understanding in the way of godliness,” and “uphold our goings in thy ways, that our “footsteps slip not.”—We beseech thee, O thou God of peace, that by faith in the blood of thy beloved Son, we may enjoy the comfort of thy reconciling grace, and sweet tranquillity in our hearts and consciences; and may our hope of forgiveness from thee render us ready to forgive others, and form our dispositions to gentleness and love. Glorifying in the cross of Christ, may we be crucified to the world, and the world to us. May we be clothed with humility, walk before thee with vigilance and circumspection, and serve thee in the spirit of adoption. Enable us, we beseech thee, for thy sake, to “do unto all men, as we “would they should do unto us,” to live in peace one with another, and “while we have time, to do “good unto all men, but especially to them that “are of the household of faith.” May thy saving grace “teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly

“lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly
“in this present world:” may we be content with
such things as we have; accommodate ourselves
to the station allotted us; conscientiously attend
to our proper duties; and watch against covetous-
ness, anger, envy, and all other sinful passions.—
Oh, may we be indeed the followers of the lowly
Jesus: may we walk as he walked; act in wisdom
towards all around us; and improve our several
talents to the glory of thy great name: and thus
may we “wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus
“Christ unto eternal life.”

We most humbly beseech thee, O Father of mercies, that thou wouldst graciously look upon our beloved friends and relatives. Bring home to thy fold such as still wander in the ways of sin and folly; and communicate all seasonable help and comfort to those, who know thy name, and love thy salvation. Recompense with thy choicest blessings all them, whose hearts thou hast disposed to be kind to us; may they and their dear children and relatives be made partakers of thy saving grace; may their souls be as a watered garden; may their temporal comforts be increased, their trials sanctified, and all their endeavours to do good be crowned with abundant success. We would also, most gracious Lord, pray thee to bless all the ministers of thy gospel; to send forth labourers into thy harvest; to prosper every method of sending thy saving truth to those who sit in

darkness and the shadow of death; to lift up a standard against the prevailing infidelity and impiety of the age; to stem the torrent of licentiousness; and in all respects to purify, bless, and enlarge thy church, and to fill the earth with the glory of thy name.

Regard with thy special mercy our favoured, but ungrateful land: though our iniquities testify against us; yet for thy own name's sake, and the honour of thy gospel, continue to us the blessed light of thy truth, and the means of grace that we enjoy. Preserve us from publick calamities, and put an end to those enormities, which call for thy vengeance upon us.—Bless our king and all the royal family with thy choicest mercies; and direct all employed in publick affairs to those measures, which may most promote our best interests and thy glory. Oh, incline and teach all orders and ranks of men amongst us, to fill up their several stations in a suitable manner, and to serve their generation according to thy will. Send peace in our time we beseech thee, O Lord: [Say to the destroying sword, it is enough, return into the scabbard.] Over-rule all changes in kingdoms and nations, to the furtherance of thy gospel, and the establishment of thy kingdom all over the earth. Compassionate, O merciful Lord, all who are afflicted, indigent, oppressed, enslaved: send them effectual deliverance, and give special consolations to thy tempted and persecuted children.

Hear, we beseech thee, these our prayers and supplications: be with us in all the employments and companies in which we may this day be engaged: may we act in them, as under thine eye, and as it becomes thy redeemed people: and may we be habitually prepared for death and judgment. These and all mercies we, unworthy sinners, humbly implore, for the sake, and through the merits and mediation of thy Son Jesus Christ; to whom, with thee, O Father and the Holy Spirit, we would ascribe co-equal and eternal praise and adoration. Amen.

An Evening Prayer for a Family.

O THOU Giver of every good gift, thou Father of mercies, and God of all consolation; we desire to close this day with thy solemn worship. Accept, we beseech thee, our unfeigned thanksgivings, for the continuance of our lives, our health, our senses, our limbs, and our rational powers; for the protection and provision thou hast hitherto afforded us; and for all the general and special benefits we enjoy. We would consider them as coming from thy hand, and as the fruits of thy unmerited kindness to us thy sinful creatures. But above all, we are

bound to thank and bless thee, for the redemption of the world by thy beloved Son; and for all the blessings of that new covenant, which he purchased by his death, and is exalted at thy right hand to bestow on all that believe. We thank thee for thy written word and thy preached gospel; and for all the abundant spiritual advantages, with which we are favoured. We praise thee for thy long-suffering towards us, when we disregarded the message of reconciliation, and continued in disobedience; for delivering us in dangers, and recovering us from sickness, when we were wholly unprepared for death; and even when we used our lives and health, in sinning still more against thee! "It is of thy mercies only that we are not consumed, because thy compassions fail not." And if at length we have been renewed to repentance, and enabled to believe thy gospel, and love thy holy ways; to thee, O Lord, we would ascribe all the glory of this blessed change. "What shall we then render to the Lord for all his benefits?" Help us, we humbly pray thee, not only to offer at thy mercy-seat our feeble sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving; but to present ourselves also as living sacrifices devoted to thy glory; and to bless thee with the more decided language of unreserved obedience.

And while we rejoice in our privileges and mercies; help us, O Lord, to remember the inexpressible sufferings of the divine Saviour, when "he

“bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead unto sin, should live unto righteousness.” Oh! grant that, looking to him whom we have pierced, we may mourn for our crimes with unfeigned sorrow; may become more deeply penitent, and be more determined in crucifying the flesh with all its affections and lusts: and may the love of Christ constrain us henceforth to live more entirely to his glory. Here, at Emmanuel’s cross may we daily learn self-denial, deadness to the world, patience, meekness, forgiveness, humility; and thus find our hearts prepared to renounce our own ease and interest, in order to honour our Redeemer, and subserve the comfort of those whom he condescends to call his brethren. May we learn “to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace;” and, looking to him who endured the cross, and despised the shame, never be weary and faint under any trials or discouragements.

Help us, O gracious God, this evening so to examine our ways, and renew our repentance; that we may have peace with thee and our consciences, through the atoning blood, before we close our eyes in sleep: and do thou extinguish every emotion of resentment or corrupt affection, which the events of the day may have excited; that we may go to rest in sweet charity with all mankind.

Prosper, O Lord, all our undertakings, as far as is good for us; and especially all our endeavours to acquire, or to communicate, the knowledge of thy

truth and will. Bless thy holy word, which any of thy servants may have spoken in publick or private; crown all their labours with success, and fill their souls with joy and consolation. Enlarge and purify thy church, and let thy grace and peace be multiplied to all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. Remember with thy choicest mercies all that pray for us, or desire a place in our supplications; and whenever we meet with dear absent friends, may we see new cause, and feel renewed dispositions for thankfulness.

And now, O gracious Father, while we commend ourselves and each other to thy special protection this night; "teach us so to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom:" and grant, that whether we live or die, we may be thine for ever. Hear us, we humbly intreat thee, and exceed all we ask, or can conceive, according to the riches of thy mercy in Christ Jesus: for whom we bless thy name, and to whom with thyself, and the eternal Spirit, we would ascribe all glory, praise, adoration, and thanksgiving, now and for evermore. Amen.

Another Morning Prayer for a Family.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, we, thy unworthy creatures, desire to bless and thank thee, for thy gracious protection, and the refreshment of sleep during the past night; and the renewed gift of life and a measure of health this morning. We would gratefully acknowledge likewise the conveniences of our dwelling and temporal provision; the comfort of kind friends and domestick peace, and all the security and tranquillity which we enjoy in this favoured country. We confess, O Lord, that we are unworthy of the least of these thy mercies: and we beseech thee, enable us to shew our unfeigned gratitude, by alacrity in every part of thy service, and a proper use of all thy benefits.

But we are bound especially to bless and praise thy holy name, O most gracious Father, for the salvation provided for us in thy son Jesus Christ our Lord. Without this inestimable benefit, no temporal peace or prosperity could have eventually profited us. By thy righteous sentence, we are doomed to die. Our present joys and sorrows, cares and pursuits, must soon vanish like the dreams of the past night; we shall shortly open our eyes amidst the important realities of the eter-

nal world. And, Oh! if thou shouldest, in that unchanging state, deal with us in strict justice according to our deserts; we could no more avoid final condemnation, than we can escape the stroke of death.

But, blessed be thy name, O Lord, our reprieves from the grave may now be improved as opportunities of seeking deliverance from the wrath to come, and of securing an incorruptible and eternal inheritance. Enable us therefore, we humbly pray thee, to regard with solemn attention thy message of reconciliation, through the mediation of Christ, and by faith in his atoning blood. Enlighten our minds to a clear perception of the nature, glory, and inestimable value of thy great salvation; and fill us with an admiring sense of thy condescending and compassionate love to lost sinners, in this stupendous method of shewing them mercy, and giving them eternal felicity. Here may we see the harmonious display of thy justice and grace, thy holy abhorrence of iniquity, and thy tender love to condemned transgressors. Help us, we humbly beseech thee, to discover, in some measure, that manifold wisdom, and all those glories, which fill the angelick hosts with admiring love, that we may learn on earth the worship of heaven, and there lisp our feeble praises "to him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Oh, enable us to give such diligence in making our calling and election sure, that we may

always be confident; knowing that when we shall be absent from the body, we shall be present with thee in glory. And if any of us have hitherto neglected the one thing needful, resting in a form of godliness, or in any way deceiving ourselves; may we be stirred up without delay to seek first thy kingdom and thy righteousness, and to subordinate all other pursuits to this grand concern.

Teach every one of us, O merciful God, to serve thee in our different employments; doing all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and using our possessions, or improving our talents, as those who duly consider how soon it may be said, "Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest no longer be steward." Enable us, we entreat thee, so to act at all times and in all things, that we may joyfully anticipate the summons, and humbly hope to be received by the Saviour with that welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Grant us, O thou Fountain of life, such consolations in communion with thee; as may render us superior to the frowns and smiles of the world, and fix our affections on things above.

Teach us also to profit by all thy rebukes and chastisements: that every painful feeling may serve to humble us, to wean us from earthly things, to embitter sin, to endear the love of our suffering Redeemer, to soften our hearts into compassion towards the afflicted, and to bow our wills

into submission to thine appointments.—And as thou, O glorious Lord of all, art pleased to permit us to call thee our heavenly Father; grant, we intreat thee, that the lively exercise of all filial affections, by the sacred influences of the Spirit of adoption, may fully testify that we are indeed the children and heirs of God. Oh, let it be the ardent desire of our inmost souls, that thy name should be hallowed, thy kingdom established, and thy will done on earth, as it is by all the inhabitants of heaven.

We pray that thy blessed gospel may be effectually preached to all the numerous and populous nations, which now sit in pagan darkness, or under Mahometan delusion. May plans be formed in wisdom, and executed with zeal, for the accomplishment of this great design. O raise up, qualify, and send forth under thy special protection, proper instruments for this arduous, but honourable, service. Pour out thy Spirit from on high upon the nations, that mountains may flow down at thy presence; and that difficulties, now deemed insuperable, may be effectually removed. Oh, prepare the way for such extensive displays of thy glorious grace, by purifying the whole visible church, from all superstition, false doctrine, and unchristian practice; by uniting believers in holy love and harmony; and by rendering all the pastors of thy flock, wise, disinterested, humble, faithful, zealous, and laborious. Stop the fatal

progress of infidelity and apostacy from Christ, which mark this degenerate age and nation: and raise up able champions for thy truth, who may contend earnestly and effectually for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Bless the places of publick education; and grant that men may continually be sent forth from them, qualified for these and other important services. Endue with wisdom, animate with zeal, and arm with patience, such persons as, amidst difficulties and disappointments, are endeavouring to promote the welfare of mankind, and to open the way to the spread of thy gospel: raise them up many helpers, and at length crown their efforts with complete success. — Teach, O Lord, all true Christians, to act consistently in their various circumstances and trials; and enable them to adorn thy gospel and rejoice in thy salvation: and bless their children also, that they may serve thee in their days, and transmit thy truth to future generations.

Oh, vouchsafe thy special grace to all our dear relatives and friends, whatever else thou mayest see good to withhold from them. Bestow thy blessing on all those whom thou hast placed in authority over us; and honour them as thy instruments, in promoting the best interests of these nations. O thou God of peace, be pleased to terminate the ravages of war, and extend thy compassionate regard to all, who in this or any other way, are

exposed to those complicated miseries, from which we are mercifully exempted.

Enable us now, we beseech thee, to enter on our several employments, in submission and obedience to thy will, and dependence on thy grace. May we be preserved from the snares of the world, and defended against the assaults of Satan: may we watch over our hearts, govern our passions, and bridle our tongues, as under the inspection of thine all-seeing eye; and be helped in all things to glorify thy name, through Jesus Christ, thy beloved Son, and our Mediator and Redeemer.—
Amen.

Another Evening Prayer for a Family.

O THOU most glorious God, with whom a thousand years are as one day, and who dwellest in light inaccessible to mortal men: the return of night reminds us how short our time is; and how soon we must finally close our eyes on all things here below, to open them in the eternal world. Our days glide away almost unperceived: Oh leave us not to neglect the important work of life, through attention to the trifles with which we are surrounded! We feel all things here on earth to

be vanity and vexation: our pains are many and increasing; our pleasures few and wasting. "Surely man walketh in a vain shew! he disquieteth himself in vain! He heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them!" "For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath we are troubled: thou hast set our iniquities before thee, and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." Teach us therefore, O merciful God, so to meditate on the shortness, uncertainty, and vanity of things temporal: and on the reality, nearness, and importance of things eternal; that we may indeed be strangers and pilgrims on earth, and may seek a heavenly inheritance, with our warmest affections and most persevering diligence. Do thou make the thoughts of death and judgment so familiar to us, and so impressive on our hearts; that they may put vigour into our prayers; may excite us to earnestness in all the means of grace; may make us decided in renouncing every idol and iniquity; and may influence us so to act in all things, as may afford us comfort upon the bed of death.

Enable us, O Lord, to mark thy hand, and to submit to thy righteousness, in all the troubles of life, and in all the painful consequences of our sins. Give us such a knowledge of thy holy law, and of its spiritual and reasonable demands; that we may become fully sensible of our exceeding sinfulness, and be deeply humbled before thee in

unfeigned repentance. May we never attempt to cover our transgressions, or to justify our conduct in thy sight; but may we so judge ourselves, that we may not be condemned at thy awful tribunal. Help us, O gracious Lord, to believe thy gospel with living faith; and continually to come unto thee, as the Fountain of life and felicity, through the righteousness and redemption of our great High Priest, who ever liveth to make intercession for us. And give us, we intreat thee, that confidence in thy pardoning mercy, and that love, gratitude, and zeal, which may prompt us to unreserved obedience, and make us stedfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in thy work.

But, O thou heart-searching God, the imperfections and defilements of our best days and services are all open to thy view! Were the rest of past lives buried in eternal oblivion, and an account of this one day required from us: our vain thoughts, idle words, and wrong tempers; our selfish desires and motives, and manifold omissions of duty, would leave us speechless and self-condemned before thee. Help us then, we earnestly intreat thee, to apply to our consciences that atoning blood, which cleanseth from all sin; and neither leave us to discouragement through unbelief, nor suffer us to abuse thy grace by any allowed disobedience.

Whatever we have this day attempted, which had a beneficial tendency, do thou, O merciful

Father, be pleased to prosper by thy blessing; and prevent the ill consequences of our errors and offences. Sanctify to us thy dispensations, and our own experience: and help us to thank thee with unfeigned hearts, for the unmerited mercies and comforts, with which we have been favoured. Bless, O Lord, all endeavours to spread thy gospel, and to promote the peace and happiness of mankind: and remember with peculiar regard, such as are labouring in remote inhospitable regions, to make known thy salvation among poor benighted Pagans.

We commend ourselves and all belonging to us, unto thy gracious protection. Thou art ever present, and knowest all things; thy majesty and condescension, thy justice and compassion, are alike infinite and adorable. "Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as Head over all." But we are exposed to countless dangers, and are wholly unable to defend ourselves. Be thou our strong Tower, and help us to take refuge under the shadow of thy wings. Preserve us from outward calamities, and from the assaults of our spiritual enemies. Help us seriously to enquire, whether we are indeed prepared to meet our God, should we be called hence this night? That we may be enabled to close our eyes, in well-grounded assurance, that death is our's; because we are Christ's, and possess the meetness for the incorruptible inheritance. Should we be spared, to

awaken in peace, and arise in health with the returning day: enable us, we beseech thee, to attend on thy worship and service with alacrity and gratitude. And thus may we “wait all the days of our appointed time, till our change come,” with calm submission, vigilant circumspection, and patient continuance in well doing. Vouchsafe us, O gracious Father, these and all other mercies, for the sake of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ; whom, with thee and the eternal Spirit, we would adore as the God of our salvation, both now and for evermore.

Another Morning Prayer for a Family.

O ALMIGHTY and eternal God, we would humbly attempt to begin this day with worshipping thy great and glorious name. Thou art worthy of universal and everlasting adoration and thankful praise. Thy nature is incomprehensible, thy perfections infinite, thy goodness inexhaustible. Thou hast created all things; thou upholdest them by the word of thy power; and every one of thy works proclaims thy glory. Thou openest thy hand, and fillest all things living with plenteousness: and so abundant is thy goodness, that even

the sinful children of men are invited to take refuge under the covert of thy wings! Thou art "in Christ reconciling the world unto thyself:" upon thy mercy-seat thou waitest to be gracious; and thy glorious wisdom, holiness, justice, and truth, are adored by the hosts of heaven, whilst thou dispensest pardons and showerest down blessings, on poor sinners who call upon thee. "Thou art exalted above all blessing and praise." How then shall we, poor sinful worms, offer any acceptable tribute to thy name? Thou mightest justly reject both us and our worship, as below thy notice, or deserving thine abhorrence: yet thou condescendest to say even of us, mean and guilty as we are, "Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me!" Yea, "thou inhabitest the praises of Israel!" Enable us, therefore, we humbly beseech thee, O merciful Father, as a holy priesthood, to offer continually such spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, as are acceptable to thee through Jesus Christ; and do thou graciously accept our bounden duty and service, not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences, through the mediation of thy well beloved Son.

But the more we meditate on thy glories and on our obligations, the viler we appear in our own eyes; remembering our manifold rebellions and base ingratitude. Our sins are indeed innumerable and inexcusable; and we would abhor ourselves on account of them, repenting in dust and ashes,

—To us belong shame and confusion of face, because we have sinned against thee: but to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness; so that our deepest humiliation may be united with prevailing hope and animating confidence. But while we rejoice in Christ Jesus, as “made unto “us Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and “Redemption;” may we expect the largest blessings from thy free bounty, fully convinced, that we merit nothing but thy wrath and indignation. Oh grant, we beseech thee, that our consciousness of guilt may endear to us the love of Christ, and may teach us forbearance and compassion to the vilest and most injurious of our fellow sinners. Enable us in this manner to exercise patience and contentment; form our hearts to teachableness, and simplicity of dependence on thy promises; and teach us readily to sit down in the lowest place, and in honour to prefer others to ourselves.

O gracious Saviour, we beseech thee to establish thy kingdom, and sway thy sceptre in our hearts, and reign Lord of all our affections: baptize us with thy sanctifying Spirit: cleanse away every pollution: consume the dross of our groveling desires and imaginations: and transform us into thine own holy image. Teach us more fervently to love thy holy name; and inspire us with pure and ardent zeal for thy glory. Communicate to us heavenly wisdom, and give us a lively relish

for spiritual pleasures. Grant, we pray thee, that we may be able to distinguish things which differ, and to approve such as are most excellent. Help us to walk in wisdom towards them that are without; and to understand and practise our several duties towards all with whom we are connected, and among whom we live. Teach us, how we may escape the snares, and resist the temptations of Satan: strengthen us with all might by thy Spirit in the inward man, that we may overcome the world, avoid its pollutions, renounce its friendship, and refuse conformity to all its sinful customs. Enable us to keep under the body and bring it into subjection; that so we may not use even lawful things in an inexpedient and injurious manner: and help us, in every respect, to fight the good fight of faith, and to lay hold on eternal life.

We commend to thy care and blessing, O gracious Lord, all who are dear unto us. Teach us, we beseech thee, with persevering zeal, to use all proper means of doing them good, and of winning upon such as still neglect thy great salvation. Bless thy whole church. Endue thy ministers with wisdom, clothe them with righteousness, and make them valiant and zealous for thy truth. Enable thy people to rejoice in thee: let thy grace be sufficient for them in all their trials and temptations; give them victory in every conflict; and prosper all their endeavours to glorify thy name, and do good to mankind. Send forth thy light

and truth to the nations: dispel the dark clouds of idolatry, impiety, superstition, and infidelity; and set up thy kingdom of peace and righteousness throughout the earth. Continue, we humbly beseech thee, to bless our land with peace and liberty, and the light of thy gospel; and may effectual measures be taken to stop the progress of wickedness and ungodliness; that so iniquity may not be our ruin. Enrich our king, and all connected with him, or placed in authority under him, with thy choicest mercies: and do thou so direct the publick councils, that such wise and salutary measures may be adopted, as thou wilt bless to the preservation of domestick harmony; the restoration and establishment of peace among the nations; the reformation of our manners, the revival of true religion, and the success of thy gospel in other parts of the world. Visit with thy tender compassion and saving grace all the sons and daughters of affliction. While thy judgments are abroad in the earth, may the inhabitants learn righteousness: and do thou, O God, be pleased to frustrate the designs of all those, who are enemies to peace and true religion.

Be graciously present with us, O merciful Father, in the various employments and occurrences of the day; may we serve thee in the discharge of every duty, from pure evangelical motives, and with uprightness and fidelity. Leave us not, we intreat thee, to grieve thy Spirit, to wound our

own consciences, to dishonour our profession, or to unfit ourselves for presenting our evening sacrifice of solemn worship. But grant, that “whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do; we may do all to the glory of thy great name.”

We beseech thee, O heavenly Father, to accept with mercy these our supplications; and to do for us exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think, through Jesus Christ, our great High Priest and Advocate. To whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

A Family Prayer on a Saturday Evening.

O THOU eternal God, in whom we live, and move, and have our being; enable us we beseech thee to close this week in that manner, which shall be most profitable to ourselves, and most honourable to thy name.

We have no occasion, O most righteous and holy God, to review the years which are past, in order to find cause of humiliation in thy sight: every day and every week suggests abundant matter for painful reflections, and adds to our conviction, that “we are all as an unclean thing, and

“and all our righteousnesses as filthy rags.” O Lord, if thou shouldest mark iniquity, who could stand? Enable us, therefore, to confess our sins with ingenuous and unreserved sorrow and shame; to own that they are more in number than the hairs of our head, and a sore burden too heavy for us to bear; and to present ourselves, in deep contrition at thy throne of grace, in humble faith and reverent boldness, through our great and compassionate High Priest, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Do thou apply the atoning blood to our consciences this evening, to purge away the guilt of the past week; that we may go to rest in peace, and not carry the guilt of any unrepented, unpardoned sin, into the ensuing week, to mar our comfort, or blast our endeavours to glorify thy name. O thou Author and Finisher of faith, help us against all the incursions of unbelief: leave us not to a dead faith and presumptuous hope; and let us not be discouraged by needless fears and scruples. Grant us peace and joy in believing; and let the love of God, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, warrant that our hope shall never cause us to be ashamed.

While we would thus seek forgiveness of all that is past, through the blood of sprinkling; enable us also to return thee our unfeigned thanks for the mercies of the past week, and of our whole lives. Blessed be thy name, O Lord our God, for the

continuance of life; the preservation, [or recovery] of health; exemption, [or relief,] from pain; the use of our limbs, senses, and faculties; the plentiful supply of our wants; the kindness of our friends, and the restraints put upon our enemies and upon wicked men; for our domestick comforts; and our privileges in this land, still favoured with liberty, peace, and the light of heavenly truth. Oh that we were more disposed to bless thee for thy goodness, and for thy wonderful works towards the children of men! We thank thee, for our abundant opportunities of religious improvement; for every degree of inclination to attend on them; and for all the benefit we have thus received. We ascribe it to thy special grace, that we have ever attended to thy gospel; and that we have been kept from turning back into the world, or from being entangled in any destructive or injurious delusion: nay, that we are not at this moment sitting in the seat of the scornful, or walking in the paths of vice and impiety. Another week hath now been added to the season of thy long-suffering, and to our season of preparation for eternity! through another week we have obtained help of God, and been in some measure enabled to cleave to thee! Accept our cordial thanks and praises for all thine unnumbered mercies, and grant that our future lives may evince our sincerity.

Whatever any of us, O gracious Father, have attempted in thy service during the past week, do

thou render effectual by thy blessing. If [by conversation, or letters, or] in any way we have endeavoured to be useful to our brethren, or our fellow-sinners; give, we beseech thee, the desired success. Though the seed sown may have been "as bread cast upon the waters;" let it not perish, but "be found after many days." And prosper the labours of those, who with greater zeal and ability, or more favourable opportunities, have sown the good seed of divine truth in any part of the world.

If, O Lord, we have presented any believing and fervent prayers before thy throne of grace; either in the closet, the family, or in publick worship; for ourselves, our beloved relatives and friends, and our Christian brethren dispersed abroad in the world; for our country, our rulers or teachers, and the different orders and ranks of men in the community; for the distressed in mind, body, or estate; for the oppressed and enslaved; for the peace of the world, the success of the gospel, and the establishment of thy kingdom: do thou graciously remember and answer all these our supplications; pardon the sinfulness cleaving to them, and far exceed them all, for the sake and honour of thy beloved Son.

Bless to us, we beseech thee, the means of grace we have this week enjoyed: and grant that, through thine assistance, we may remember and be edified by all we have read or heard from thy

holy word. Sanctify also to us the dispensations of thy providence: teach us to profit by all thy chastisements; and to learn gratitude and confidence in thee, by all thy mercies: and may even the experience we have of our own weakness and folly, excite us to more fervent prayers for wisdom, strength, and grace, according to thy precious promises.

And now, O merciful God, we beseech thee, to prepare our hearts for the approaching day of sacred rest: and teach us so to arrange all our temporal concerns, that our thoughts may not be occupied, our attention distracted, nor our minds ruffled by them, when we would wait on thee in thy holy services. Let us not deem thy sabbaths a weariness; but our delight, our privilege, and great advantage. May the care of our own souls, and of the souls of those who belong to us, sweetly occupy the hours of the day. By self-examination, and meditation on thy word, may we obtain increasing acquaintance with ourselves, our spiritual estate, the progress we have made, or the loss we have sustained, in this important concern. Enable us, we beseech thee, to humble ourselves before thee in true repentance, and cordially to renew our acceptance of thy salvation: and, while we wait on thee, may our strength be repaired; may every grace be brought into vigorous exercise; and our knowledge of thy truth and will in all respects enlarged. Assist us in thy publick worship,

and favour us with thy special presence and blessing. May thy people, with whom we worship, be refreshed, comforted, and sanctified in thy courts; and grant thy special assistance and blessing to thy ministers, in their work and labour of love. Oh, that increasing numbers may be added to thy churches, of such as shall be saved; and many able and faithful labourers sent forth into the harvest; and may the Sun of righteousness diffuse his healing influence, wherever the sun in the firmament enlightens the nations with his beams. Hear us, O merciful Father, in these our supplications; take us under thy protection this night; fit us, both in body and soul, for the duties of the ensuing day, and by them prepare us for thy eternal sabbath, for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Spirit, One God in three Persons, even the God of our salvation, be glory and honour from all creatures, now and for evermore. Amen.

A Family Prayer for the Lord's Day Morning.

O THOU God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of all that truly believe in him; we meet together this morning to thank and bless thee, for sparing us to see another day of sacred rest; and to implore thy gracious aid in keeping it holy to thy name. Alas, how many sabbaths have some of us wasted in vanity and folly, in sloth or worldly concerns, in frivolous company, amusement, or animal indulgence! And since we have known something of thy salvation, how very imperfectly have we obeyed thy command, of sanctifying thy holy day! If thou shouldst enter into judgment with us according to our deserts, our transgressions in this single point would leave us speechless under thy awful sentence of condemnation. But though we have thus been ungrateful and perverse; though we have robbed thee of thy hallowed time, and of the glory due to thy name; yet, we beseech thee, magnify thy mercy in pardoning our sins, and in giving us thy grace, that we may henceforth walk in newness of life.

We bless thy name, O Lord our God, that thou hast appointed this season of rest from our worldly pursuits; and made this provision for our spiritual advantage: and we thank thee, if our hearts are in

any degree inclined to avail ourselves of so invaluable a benefit. Help us, we beseech thee, to remember thee as our Creator, who, having in six days made this world, and man to inhabit it, didst pronounce the whole *very good*; and didst rest on the seventh day, with full satisfaction and ineffable delight, in this display of thine eternal power and Godhead: and didst command man to keep it holy; to contemplate thy glories, to celebrate thy praises, and to rejoice in thy goodness.—But alas, how soon did sin mar thy good work, and derange this happy plan! And how can transgressors rejoice in a holy God, whose wrath they have incurred, and from whom their hearts are alienated? Blessed be thy name, O Lord, for the revelation of thy mercy in Christ Jesus, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world!” Now sinners may approach and rejoice in God their Creator, as their reconciled Father and Friend! We would therefore adore the displays of thy glory in the works thou hast made, and in the course of thy bounteous providence. All thou doest is worthy to be had in honour; and our obligations to thee as our Creator and Benefactor can never be sufficiently acknowledged. But when we contemplate the stupendous plan of redemption, and view the incarnate Son of God dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification; we feel that this is, to us sinners, the most interesting and endearing of all the discoveries thou

hast made of thyself; as well as the fullest display of the harmonious glories of thy character, in the view of thy whole intelligent creation. Oh, enable us, we pray thee, by the teaching of thy Holy Spirit, so to meditate on these subjects, especially on this season of sacred rest; that our hearts may be humbled in repentance, inspired with confidence, filled with admiring love and animating gratitude, and prepared for rendering thee our tribute of praise and thanksgiving. But, O Lord, the subject is too vast for us! Thy love passeth knowledge! We cannot worthily praise thy glorious perfections. Yet we beseech thee, in thy infinite condescension and fatherly compassion, to accept our feeble efforts, and to help us to love thee more, and praise thee better.

Grant, we beseech thee, that we may hallow this thy sacred day with reverence, devotion and alacrity. Exclude from our thoughts and hearts all worldly cares; and let no circumstance arise, or person intrude, to interrupt us in its important and delightful duties. May all the hours, which can be spared from matters of *real* necessity, be spent in works of piety and charity; may a spiritual mind render them pleasant to us; and may our converse and social intercourse be seasoned with piety, and promote mutual edification. Vouchsafe us thy special blessing in studying thy word, reviewing our past lives, calling to mind thy mercies, examining the state of our souls, and

pouring out our hearts before thee.—May we count a day spent in thy courts better than a thousand; and be glad when it is said to us, let us go unto the house of the Lord. Leave us not to admit of any vain excuse, for not attending on thine ordinances; but grant that we may ever feel more disappointment when confined from thy worship, than when prevented from an expected interview with our dearest friends.—We would go, with the desire of our souls, to meet thee according to thy promise: and we beseech thee, enable us by faith to realize thy glorious and gracious presence, and solemnize and encourage our hearts; Oh grant us the assistance of thy Holy Spirit in every part of the sacred service: raise us above that dulness and languor which so often oppress us; and preserve us from the intrusion of vain and wandering thoughts. May our confession of sin, our prayers and supplications, our praises and thanksgivings, be the language of our inmost soul, and an acceptable sacrifice through Christ our Lord.

Prepare our hearts, O merciful Father, as good ground to receive the good seed of divine truth: and may thy word, read and preached, be heard by us in humble teachableness, mixed with faith, and applied to our own cases and consciences. Oh deliver us from all our prejudices; remove every veil which closes our understandings, and every bias that warps our judgment. Instruct us where ignorant, rectify our mistakes, convince

us of our sins, confirm our faith, encourage our hopes, enliven our affections: and thus fit us for serving thee, with wisdom and zeal, in the several stations in which we are placed. ¹ [And when some of us shall meet at thy table, give us thy special help; that in deep repentance, lively faith, and fervent love, we may remember our dear Redeemer's sufferings and death, renew our acceptance of his salvation, render our tribute of grateful praise, and yield ourselves up to thy service, as "bought with a price to glorify thee with our "bodies and spirits, which are thine." Thus may we 'feed on Christ in our hearts by faith with 'thanksgiving;' and be strengthened for every future service and conflict, by this "Bread of life "which came down from heaven."]

Bless, we beseech thee, O gracious Lord, those who shall assemble with us in thy courts; [and those who meet with us at thy table;] vouchsafe to thy believing people all those good things, which we have asked, or should ask for ourselves. Compassionate those, who have hitherto been formal worshippers, and strangers to thy saving grace. Awaken the careless, undeceive the deluded, guide the enquirer, comfort the broken-hearted, confirm the wavering, and excite to diligence such as have been lukewarm and slothful. Assist and prosper thy servants, who labour among us in the word and doctrine. Give them wisdom, zeal,

¹ On the days when the Lord's Supper is administered.

faithfulness, tenderness, and compassion. Help them rightly to divide the word of truth, and to speak such things as suit the various characters and cases of the congregation. Give them much comfort and success in their work; and grant them many seals to their ministry, who may be their joy here, and their crown of rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus. Remove every hindrance to their usefulness; and bring forth many from all around, whom thou wilt make partakers of thy saving grace, and instruments of diffusing the light of thy truth, and of handing it down to future generations, that the children who are yet unborn may praise the Lord. Vouchsafe the same blessings to all faithful pastors and their congregations; and grant that all who are called ministers of Christ 'may be illuminated with the knowledge of 'thy truth,' and both by their doctrine and example make it known, and recommend it to mankind.

Send forth, O thou Lord of the harvest, more labourers thoroughly furnished for thy work. Enlighten the dark parts of the earth with thy saving grace. Remember, with special regard, such as are employed in distant regions and arduous circumstances, to make known thy gospel: comfort their hearts, prosper their endeavours, and raise them up many helpers. Purify thy church from scandals and heresies. Cause divisions among Christians to cease. "Multiply

“mercy, grace, and peace, to all that love the
“Lord Jesus in sincerity;” and by the prevalence
of thy gospel terminate wars all over the earth.

Look in mercy on such as are confined from thy
courts by sickness or family afflictions; and by
thine immediate teaching and blessing, make up
to them the want of publick ordinances. Pity the
multitudes, who are every where profaning thy holy
sabbath, and give them repentance unto salvation.
Remember all with whom we have at any time
“gone to the house of God in company;” and let
our prayers, though now separated, be accepted
for each other. Be with us through the day. May
we be edified, and thy name be glorified; and may
we meet in the evening, with peaceful consciences
and thankful hearts. Hear us through the merits
and mediation of thy beloved Son, our Lord and
Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

A Family Prayer for the Lord's Day Evening.

O THOU most holy and merciful God, we, thine
unworthy servants, desire this evening to review,
as in thy presence, the day past; humbling our-
selves for our sinfulness, and thanking thee for all
thy loving kindnesses.

When we endeavour to examine any part of our conduct, or to compare it with thy holy law: we never fail to discover abundant cause for humiliation. Alas, not only have our actual transgressions and omissions been innumerable and aggravated: but each of us has cause to exclaim, when contemplating thy glories, "Woe is me for I am undone, because I am one of unclean lips, and mine eyes have seen the King the Lord of Hosts!" O God! Our very worship is so defiled and defective; that, instead of atoning for our past sins, or recommending us to thy favour, it needs thy gracious forgiveness, and must be washed in the blood of Christ. Pardon then, we beseech thee this evening, whatever thy holy eyes have seen amiss in the duties of the day: the wanderings of our hearts, the coldness of our affections; our want of reverence, love, and gratitude; the weakness of our faith, the wavering of our hope; the mixture of self-seeking and regard to men, with which our religious services have been contaminated. And grant that all our supplications and thanksgivings, as far as they have been uprightly presented before thy throne of grace, under the influences of thy Holy Spirit, may be mercifully accepted, through the mediation of our heavenly Advocate. We desire also, O Lord our God, to crave thy fatherly forgiveness of every thought, word, and action, by which we have grieved thy Spirit, dishonoured thy name, or

counteracted the gracious designs of this thy holy day. Wash us thoroughly from all our sins, in the fountain of atoning blood; and vouchsafe us the comfort of thy pardoning love, and the enjoyment of thy peace, before we close our eyes in sleep.

Suffer not, O merciful Lord, the ordinances of this sacred season to rise up at last in judgment against us, to our confusion or condemnation: let not thy word of grace be a savour of death to any individual now before thee. But, O thou Giver of every good gift, teach us to improve our advantages; and render the *transient* seasons of public ordinances a *permanent* blessing to our souls. Let us not rest satisfied, with having been serious, impressed, affected, or comforted, when hearing thy word; or with conscious sincerity in our worship [or in our engagements at thy table]: but let us so meditate upon these things with self-application and fervent prayer; that our judgment may be matured, our spiritual wisdom and discernment increased, our faith and hope established, our affections purified and invigorated, and our wills rendered more submissive, by every attendance on the means of grace. Thus enable us to "give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard; lest at any time we should let them slip." Suffer us not to be as "children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine:" but make us such Christians, as "by reason of use have their senses

“exercised to discern good and evil.” [And may we also remember that the vows of God are upon us: and in all the transactions of life duly consider, that we have avouched the Lord to be our God; and ourselves to be his people, as redeemed unto him by the blood of his Son.] May we carry the instructions of thy word, and the savour of thy holy ordinances, along with us, into all the secular affairs of the ensuing week; to teach us wisdom and circumspection, to arm us against temptation, to be the light of our steps, and the strength of our heart. Oh grant, that as the face of Moses shone, when he came down from the mount: so when we go from communion with thee, in thy solemn worship; our light may shine before men, to the glory of thy name, and the adorning of the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Prosper, we beseech thee, the labours of all those who have any where, this day, preached the word of truth in simplicity and godly sincerity. May thy people be edified in their most holy faith, and sinners in great numbers be converted unto thee. And, where serious impressions have been made, let them be rendered effectual unto eternal salvation. Hear all the supplications, which have this day been presented before thee by thine assembled people; for themselves, their children, and relatives; for thy whole church, for all ranks and orders of men, and for the whole human race;

according to their several wants, trials, or circumstances. May thy cause every where prevail; may thy truth run and be glorified. Oh stop the progress of false doctrine, and lift up a standard against infidelity, impiety, and licentiousness: and let peace, and the gospel of peace, fill the whole earth.

And now, O heavenly Father, we commend ourselves to thy keeping this night. Watch over us and our habitation. Give us the comforts of refreshing sleep; and defend us against all enemies, especially those that would injure our souls. And grant, that by hallowing thy sabbath on earth, we may be rendered more and more "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." May all our days and weeks be thus begun, continued, and ended with thee: and grant that all we, who now unite in prayer on earth, may at length meet before thy throne in heaven, to sing thy praises and triumph in thy love, through the righteousness, atonement, and intercession of our great High Priest, and to the honour of his name; who is, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, God over all, blessed for evermore. Amen.

THE END.

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ERRATA.

- Page 38, l. 4, for *properties*, read *proprieties*.
- 106, l. 7, expunge, *that one*.
- 369, l. 6, for, *is person*, read *person is*.
- 515, l. 15, for *in*, read *and*.





